

PE2128/B: Increase funding for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions and ensure that waiting time information is accurate

Scottish Government written submission, 8 April 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on the Scottish Government's efforts to address waiting times for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions, and particularly free-flap procedures. I have outlined a response to each of your queries below.

- **Update on the work with Health Boards to develop a plan for patients waiting for delayed reconstructive surgery**

As outlined in my initial response of 9 January 2025, it will not be possible to identify a rapid solution for delayed free-flap reconstruction waits due to the theatre time required. Free-flap reconstruction can take many hours to complete and requires significant operative skill, along with input from both breast and plastic surgery. Unfortunately, this means that waiting times for free-flap procedures will not improve substantially in the short-term for the majority of patients.

However, I am pleased to report we are beginning to see pockets of real change following the allocation of our targeted funding for risk-reducing mastectomy and immediate reconstructive surgery as part of our £30 million additional funding for planned care in 2024-25.

To March 2025, thirteen long-waiting patients in NHS Grampian have had their delayed reconstruction procedures completed and another two have been booked, with thanks to the Board's hard-working staff. This is in addition to the activity that has been undertaken for risk-reducing mastectomy and reconstruction within the Board. Prior to last year's funding, NHS Grampian reportedly had some of the longest waiting patients across the country for these surgeries.

As part of this year's £200 million investment to reduce waiting times and improve capacity, we have already agreed to extend this funding for NHS Grampian for 2025-26 and thereafter our intention is for the Board to receive this on a recurring basis to ensure service sustainability in the long-term. The decision on recurring funding is subject to the current allocation exercise so cannot be confirmed at this time.

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde provides regional breast reconstruction services via the plastic surgery unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary for patients in the West of Scotland and therefore has the largest waiting list for a delayed free-flap procedure. From our £30 million investment, we provided funding for two locum plastic surgery consultants which were aligned to incoming breast cancer work to release the Board's existing oncoplastic consultants to concentrate on breast risk reduction surgery. This funding has also been extended for 2025-26 and similarly the intention is to provide this recurrently from this year onwards.

NHS Tayside is offering delayed reconstruction surgery as often as opportunity exists within their current capacity and the service is looking to recruit a new consultant within the immediate future to support these procedures. Similarly, NHS Lothian continues to offer these surgeries on a regular basis.

Both these Boards were also allocated funding in 2024-25 from the £30 million investment to support risk-reducing mastectomy and reconstruction. Further scoping is required to establish whether additional funding support will be required in future years.

- **Information on the capacity of specialised plastic surgeons and whether the Scottish Government has considered how to address any gaps in the availability of specialised plastic surgery services.**

Through our engagement with Health Boards we have identified a capacity gap across NHS Scotland in terms of the number of consultants who are qualified to provide microsurgical breast reconstruction.

We are engaging with NHS Education For Scotland (NES) to understand current training capacity and explore options to maximise training opportunities in this area, assessing the relative contribution of speciality training programmes and peri-/post-Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) fellowships in this area.

- **Update on the commitment to exploring the publication of data on the current waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery.**

Public Health Scotland (PHS) uses the national waiting times datamart to collect electronic patient records covering the waits that patients experience waiting for treatment as an inpatient or day-case under the Treatment Time Guarantee.

This data source can be used routinely to identify the specialty of treatment. However, although the records are designed to collect coded information on the procedure that is planned for the patient, this information is often either incomplete, lacking in essential detail and/or its accuracy cannot be assured. In addition, the procedure(s) that was planned may not always reflect the procedure actually performed after the patient was admitted for treatment. The latter is not captured through the national datamart. Consequently, PHS is not currently able to report accurately on waiting times to this level of detail.

Regrettably, this means that it is currently not within our gift to publish quality assured information on waiting times for delayed breast reconstruction surgery.

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