

24 April 2024

Letters to EEA Nationals about Entitlement to Free Health Service Treatment

We have been made aware that some EEA nationals have received letters from hospital Trusts in Northern Ireland about their entitlement to free health service treatment. Please could you provide answers to the following questions, as far as possible?

- 1. How many letters from your Trust requesting evidence of entitlement to free health service treatment have been sent for the following years: 2022, 2023 and 2024 (to date)?**

Unfortunately we are unable to provide the total number of letters for EEA nationals only as a patient nationality is not routinely recorded. Any efforts to obtain this would involve a very extensive manual exercise into each case file to ascertain EEA status.

The Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit', as defined by the Freedom of Information Act under Section 12. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified as £450 for public authorities such as Belfast Trust. This represents the cost of one or more persons spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.

- 2. How many questionnaires from these letters have been returned for the following years: 2022, 2023 and 2024 (to date)?**

Questionnaires are held within each patient's case file and, therefore, confirming the number of questionnaires returned for each year would involve a very extensive manual exercise into each case file. In some cases they may not have been returned as this is not always necessary, for instance if the patient provides evidence of exemption, e.g. EHIC.

As above, the Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit'.

- 3. How many of the returned questionnaires were received from EEA nationals in the following years: 2022, 2023 and 2024 (to date)?**

Questionnaires are held within each patient's case file and, therefore, confirming the number of questionnaires returned for each year by EEA nationals would involve a very extensive manual exercise into each case file.

Again the Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit'.