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Waiting list data for Arthritis

I am writing to make a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please provide the following information for the most recent available period, and where possible, for each of the last four quarters.

Waiting Lists by Type of Arthritis

Q1A. Please provide a breakdown of waiting lists from the past four quarters by specific type of arthritis (including, but not limited to, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, and other inflammatory arthropathies).

This information is not recorded and would require a manual trawl of patients records which would take more than 18 hours to complete

Q1B. Please provide the number of patients waiting for initial consultation and for treatment within the Belfast HSC Trust in the last four quarters.

June 2025- June 2026: 3,470 patients on Rheumatology New Waiting list for an initial consultation appointment within Belfast HSC Trust.

Procedural Type Data

Q2A. Please provide a breakdown of waiting list numbers by procedure type related to orthopaedic and arthritis care (for example, Total Hip Replacement, Total Knee Replacement, hand/wrist surgery and spinal procedures).

Body Area	30/09/2025	31/12/2025	31/03/2026	30/06/2026
Arm	51	49	44	48
Ankle	149	156	150	150
Back	1087	1046	993	923
Elbow	219	222	215	207
Foot	1502	1399	1345	1335
Hand	1671	1697	1734	1729
Hip	2179	2158	2200	2219
Knee	3912	3905	3801	3858
Leg	68	74	71	74
Neck	37	36	39	36
Pelvis	5	6	8	7

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Shoulder	1525	1548	1528	1537
Spine	733	687	701	716
Thigh	22	18	12	12
Wrist	104	116	124	124
Other*	40	37	45	57
Grand Total	13304	13154	13010	13032

*Other relates to body area's that could not be identified

Q2B. Please provide the average waiting times for each procedure type over the past four quarters.

Average Waiting Time in weeks				
Body Area	30/09/2025	31/12/2025	31/03/2026	30/06/2026
Ankle	60	54	49	54
Arm	24	67	75	61
Back	208	139	154	173
Elbow	88	80	85	93
Foot	202	115	103	88
Hand	231	39	45	47
Hip	183	35	35	34
Knee	229	48	46	44
Leg	30	31	32	25
Neck	15	56	66	80
Pelvis	3	31	32	41
Shoulder	269	115	119	118
Spine	181	249	251	239
Thigh	11	29	39	37
Wrist	47	61	64	66
Other*	16	76	78	16

*Other relates to body area's that could not be identified

Removals from Orthopaedic Waiting Lists -

Q3A. Please provide the number of patients removed from orthopaedic waiting lists within the Belfast Trust over the last four quarters.

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	2025		2026	
	Qtr3	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2
Total Removals	774	755	671	704

Q3B. Please provide a breakdown of the reasons for removal, including (but not limited to): treatment completed elsewhere, patient choice, clinical decision, non-attendance, administrative removal, or other categories used.

	2025		2026	
Removal Reason (IPDC)	Qtr3	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2
Admin Validation - Admin Error	57	19	39	25
Admin Validation - Duplicate Other Trust	<5	<5	<5	8
Admin Validation - Duplicate Same Trust	29	22	16	25
Admin Validation - No Longer Required	18	35	24	66
Admin Validation - No Response to Validation	8	23	13	18
Admin Validation - Treated Elsewhere	<5	5	5	<5
Admin Validation - Treated Privately	15	15	46	22
Clinical Validation - Admin Error	5	5	<5	<5
Clinical Validation - Duplicate Other Trust	<5	<5	<5	<5
Clinical Validation - Duplicate Same Trust	<5	<5	<5	10
Clinical Validation - No Longer Required	<5	38	23	33
Clinical Validation - Treated Elsewhere	<5	<5	<5	8
Clinical Validation - Treated Privately	<5	7	13	<5
Clinician - Medical Reason	22	18	17	8
Clinician - Not Now Required	78	81	78	68
Hospital - Discharged to GP Federation	<5	<5	<5	<5
Hospital - No Response to Contact	<5	7	5	<5
Hospital - Other	33	32	32	34
Hospital - Patient Discharged from Trust	17	18	17	18
Hospital - Patient Seen Separately for Same Condition	35	27	12	10
Hospital - Transferred to Another Trust	5	<5	<5	<5
Patient - Not Now Required	342	261	196	215
Patient - Other	46	46	38	50
Patient - Patient Refused	14	21	11	26
Patient - Treated by ROI Reimbursement Scheme	<5	11	37	15
Patient Died	35	49	35	28
Grand Total	774	755	671	704

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	2025		2026	
Removal Reason (Outpatient)	Qtr3	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2
Admin Validation - Admin Error	29	7	<5	<5
Admin Validation - Duplicate Other Trust	<5	<5	<5	<5
Admin Validation - Duplicate Same Trust	12	56	55	286
Admin Validation - No Longer Required	183	15	<5	148
Admin Validation - No Response to Validation	564	42	<5	120
Admin Validation - Treated Elsewhere	<5	<5	<5	12
Admin Validation - Treated Privately	6	15	17	31
Clinical Validation - Admin Error	<5	<5	<5	6
Clinical Validation - Duplicate Other Trust	<5	<5	<5	<5
Clinical Validation - Duplicate Same Trust	<5	32	<5	7
Clinical Validation - No Longer Required	<5	5	<5	<5
Clinical Validation - Treated Elsewhere	<5	<5	<5	<5
Clinical Validation - Treated Privately	<5	6	<5	<5
Clinician - Medical Reason	<5	<5	<5	<5
Clinician - Not Now Required	506	442	144	232
Hospital - No Response to Contact	43	61	149	119
Hospital - Other	207	201	368	266
Hospital - Patient Discharged from Trust	55	37	109	115
Hospital - Patient Seen Separately for Same Condition	10	6	9	15
Hospital - Transferred to Another Trust	18	11	30	14
Patient - Not Now Required	102	87	88	139
Patient - Other	87	46	29	56
Patient - Patient Refused	21	33	28	29
Patient Died	39	41	39	29
Grand Total	1895	1155	1088	1638

We are unable to provide an exact figure where numbers are very low. To provide this level of information would reduce numbers to discoverable limits where the patients could be identifiable.

This is exempt from release under section 40(2) Personal Information relating to a third party, of the FOI Act.

Disclosure would constitute a breach of the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Q3C. Please outline the Trust's policy of PIFU. (Patient Initiated Follow Up)

The Belfast Trust does not have a Policy on Patient Initiated Follow-up (PIFU). The purpose of PIFU is to allow patients to initiate a review appointment with the clinician

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when they most need help. The benefit of this is that it avoids unnecessary follow-up appointments and frees up capacity in outpatient clinics for the patients who need to be seen.

For ease of reference I have included a Patient and Clinician information leaflet. A copy of the purpose of PIFU is detailed below.

Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU) Toolkit			
What is it?	PIFU describes when a patient (or their carer) can initiate their own follow-up appointments when / if required, rather than an automatic follow-up e.g. when symptoms or circumstances change. This approach empowers patients to manage their own condition and supports clinicians to see patients most in need more quickly.	How do I get started?	There is support to help any healthcare professional to set up a PIFU pathway for patients they feel are clinically appropriate. Training is available for clinical and admin teams at a date and time convenient to you. For support please contact: OPModernisation@belfasttrust.hscni.net
How does it improve the patient experience?	Patients are seen when they need it the most which empowers patients to take control over their own care. Care is better suited to a patient's individual needs and preferences which means better outcomes for them, avoiding unnecessary follow-up visits.	How can I set this up?	Let us know that you are interested, what the clinical pathway might be and we will support you with the set up of this, in conjunction with the appointments and admin teams.
How does this work?	A shared decision is made between the patient and the healthcare professional that PIFU is an appropriate pathway and the patient is placed on a PIFU list, allowing them to request an appointment within an agreed timeframe.	Is this recorded as clinical activity?	Yes, there is a specific waiting list code created for PIFU patients. When a patient requests an appointment this is coded as a PIF slot on clinics and counted as review outpatient activity.
What are the benefits of PIFU?	Avoids unnecessary follow-up visits for patients which frees up capacity in clinics to see the most urgent patients. This reduces low value encounters using clinic time / space.	How can I get details of my activity?	You can review clinic activity by using the clinic codes on PAS or on Systemview. For audit purposes you can also contact: activitystats@belfasttrust.hscni.net for regular reports.

Please see attached PIFU information:

- PIFU Implementation 'How To Guide'
- PIFU SOP template which is completed according to each service/speciality PIFU requirements
- PIFU Patient Information Leaflet template which is completed according to each service/speciality PIFU requirements

Deaths While on Waiting Lists

In light of Professor Mark Taylor informing the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health on 23.04.26 that roughly 6000 people had died on waiting lists in the last year.

4A. Please outline the number of patients who died while on an orthopaedic waiting list within the last four quarters.

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	2025		2026	
Removal Reason (IPDC)	Qtr3	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2
Patient Died	35	49	35	28

	2025		2026	
Removal Reason (Outpatient)	Qtr3	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2
Patient Died	39	41	39	29

If possible, could this data be separated by type of orthopaedic wait as well as separated between outpatient and inpatient.

5. Cross Border Reimbursement Scheme (Reimbursement Clarification)

Please Provide:

1. Please provide a description of the methodology used by the Trust to calculate reimbursement amounts for treatments accessed under the scheme.
2. Please outline any guidance documents, internal policies, or standard operating procedures used in determining reimbursement levels.
3. Please provide information on how Health and Social Care Northern Ireland equivalent costs are calculated for the purpose of reimbursement.
4. Please provide details of any caps, limits, or thresholds applied to reimbursement amounts.
5. Please detail any assessments, reviews, or analysis carried out since the introduction of the scheme regarding whether reimbursement levels reflect the actual cost of treatment in the Republic of Ireland.
6. Please outline how the Trust calculates the cost of a procedure in the Republic of Ireland, and does this policy be regularly updated to reflect the changes in prices of services in the Republic of Ireland.



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The cross boarder reimbursement scheme is all dealt with through SPPG/DoH and so this query should be directed to them at FOI@health-ni.gov.uk;