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11th February 2019

Deputy Pearse Doherty, T.D.
Dail Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ Ref 3883/19

"To ask the Minister for Health the community based suicide support services in place in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter".

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your recent correspondence in relation to the above. The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

Within County Donegal there are several community based suicide support services which are available to support people feeling suicidal and also to support family members who are bereaved following the death by suicide of their loved one. The following are the prevention services that are currently available in County Donegal:

1. The Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse (SCAN) Service is supported by 2.0 WTE Clinical Nurse Specialists who provide assessment, support and intervention to people who are feeling suicidal and who present to their GP. The SCAN service operates directly with the GP's in Primary Care Centres and will also refer to the Community Health Care Teams and Department of Psychiatry if admission to acute services is required.

2. Similarly, the Deliberate Self Harm (DSH) Services is supported by 2.0 WTE Clinical Nurse Specialists based in the Emergency Department of Letterkenny University Hospital who provide assessment, support and assessment for people who have completed acts of deliberate self-harm and / or are feeling suicidal. This service operates 7 days per week from 8am until 8pm. Again this service will refer to either the Department of Psychiatry for acute inpatient treatment or to the Community Mental Health Care team for onwards follow up and interventions.
3. Medical assistance is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week as a NCHD on call service and Consultant on call service is available to respond to people in need as they attend Letterkenny University Hospital or are referred by their GP or Community Mental Health Care Team.
4. Pieta House are funded nationally to provide a therapeutic approach to people who are suicidal or who are experiencing self-harm and this service, whilst based in Letterkenny is available to all people in Donegal.
5. Connecting for Life Donegal, was the first local suicide prevention plan in the country and was launched in July 2015. There are currently two Connecting for Life Implementation Groups which focus on (a) community based actions and (b) service based actions. The groups include membership from the HSE, Donegal County Council, Youth and Community Organisations, Traveller's Organisation, Family Resource Centres, General Practitioners, Jigsaw, Donegal Women's Centre, The North West Alcohol Forum and Pieta House.

There are many key actions from the Connecting for Life Strategy which has been and continues to be rolled out across Donegal and these include the following initiatives:

- A programme of events is delivered by the community and voluntary sector to mark and celebrate World Mental Health Day each year.
- A programme of training is also delivered to a range of target audiences right across County Donegal and include the "MindOut" Training Programme delivered to post primary school teachers, SafeTALK, ASIST, Mental Health First Aid and Understanding Self Harm Training has been delivered to many groups, organisations and individuals across Donegal.
- The majority of Family Resource Centres have completed training and have implemented the Suicide Code of Practice.
- An initiative called Taxi Watch has been launched recently where taxi drivers will undertake SafeTALK and will be empowered to respond to people in distress.

- A GP Referral Pathway has been developed and introduced which gives a clear outline of the referral options available to GPs on a 24-hour basis to support someone who is a risk of suicide.
- STORM training which focuses on suicide prevention has been and continues to be delivered to mental health service staff in County Donegal and the North West Alcohol Forum is funded to deliver on a number of key issues regarding alcohol misuse.
- Donegal County Council hosts the annual Connecting for Life Conference which promotes awareness of death by suicide. Coinciding with this conference there has been the delivery of the Lived Lives Exhibition which has taken place in the Regional Cultural Centre in November 2018, which was the third time this powerful exhibition had taken place in County Donegal.
- A Crisis Service Poster has also been introduced and distributed widely across the County to share the details of services that are available widely for people in crisis. The poster encourages people to take a photo, so that they always have the contact details for services close at hand.
- Following the death of a loved one by suicide there are a number of postvention supports available. Donegal Mental Health Services offer a structured communication and support service to bereaved families following the death of a service user by suicide. A suicide bereavement liaison service is also offered to bereaved families by Pieta House and the HSE provides a traumatic bereavement counselling service, which priorities support to those bereaved by suicide.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me,

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Dykes
General Manager
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