



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an tUas. Pat Bennett,
Príomhoifigeach, Eagraíocht Cúram
Sláinte Pobail, Lár Tíre, An Lú, An
Mhí
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse
Sláinte, Oifig Cheantair, Bóthar
Ardáin, An Tulach Mhór, Co. Uíbh
Fhailí.

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2nd August, 2019

Mr. Robert Troy T.D.,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re: Parliamentary Question – 27038/19

To ask the Minister for Health if the situation will be addressed in which patients referred to counselling services in CHO area 8 receive seven counselling sessions at the primary care stage and then must wait a further six months before being re-referred; the reason for same; and if the waiting period will be removed in view to the urgent and sensitive nature of counselling cases -Robert Troy

Dear Deputy Troy,

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 outline the position as follows.

The HSE Counselling in Primary Care service was set up in 2013 to provide short-term counselling to adults on the GMS scheme presenting with mild to moderate psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, panic, relationship issues, loss and stress. The counselling model offers an initial assessment appointment to determine the suitability of the service and up to eight additional counselling sessions. Clients who are in need of a more intensive/longer-term intervention are aided to access other counselling/mental health supports as appropriate. Some examples of these are onward referral to the HSE National Counselling Service for those who have experienced trauma or abuse in childhood, and referral to adult mental health services for individuals presenting with severe/longstanding anxiety/depression, eating and bipolar disorders, and other serious mental health conditions.

The Counselling in Primary Care Model also aims to promote client self-efficacy and empowerment in relation to fostering positive mental health. Clients are supported to access local and community supports, such as the HSE Social Prescribing service, Men's Sheds, and the Mojo Programme, and to build their own resources using Mindfulness, relaxation and other personal development activities that they can continue with after their counselling has ended.

The HSE Counselling in Primary Care Service in Midlands Louth Meath Community Healthcare Organisation initially had waiting lists of up to three months, but due to a consistent increase in referrals year on year since 2013 – up to 30% in some areas (2014-2018 comparison) – these waiting times have grown to between three and seven months, depending on the location where counselling is accessed. There has been no commensurate increase in the budget since the launch of this State-wide mental health resource in 2013. The service has to carefully balance the needs of clients currently attending, the structure under which it was set up to deal with mild to moderate psychological difficulties, and those people still waiting to access counselling. Counselling in Primary Care is not in a position to extend the service delivery within the current resources available.

I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Pat Bennett
Chief Officer
Midlands Louth Meath CHO