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29th December 2020

Deputy Mark Ward,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 42252/20 - To ask the Minister for Health the way in which social prescribing is delivered for those presenting to general practitioners with no acute mental health problems such as anxiety and depression; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

-Mark Ward

Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Social Prescribing is a means of enabling GPs, and other health professionals, to refer patients to a range of local, non-clinical services provided by the voluntary and community sector. Social Prescribing can also support people to access services provided by the HSE such as Smoking Cessation, Self- management Support programmes etc. Social Prescribing involves three key components – i) a referral from a GP or healthcare professional, ii) a consultation with a Social Prescribing coordinator or Link worker and iii) an agreed referral to a local voluntary, community and social enterprise organisation or service.

Social Prescribing is an option for GPs to refer people who are experiencing social exclusion, isolation or loneliness; have vague or unexplained symptoms; symptoms of depression or anxiety; are frequent attendees or have poor social support. The benefits of social prescribing are positive, emotional, cognitive and social outcomes and an increase in connectedness for people within their communities. It therefore provides GPs and other primary care professionals with non-medical referral options to improve the health and wellbeing of their patients/clients.

Currently Social Prescribing is available in approx. 18 sites across the country so it is likely that many GPs may not yet be aware of this service and its potential benefits. HSE Health & Wellbeing is currently developing a framework to mainstream Social Prescribing within the HSE to guide the development at a Community Healthcare Network level.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Deely

Helen Deely

Interim Assistant National Director
Health & Wellbeing