

26th October 2020

Deputy David Cullinane
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 28183 /20 Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the number of staff redeployed and deployed through Be on Call and other campaigns as part of the swab, test and trace system to identify Covid-19 cases by origin that is, HSE pre-existing, HSE new for Covid-19, Be on Call and so on, by occupation, by CHO by weekly average for the period 1 March to 30 September 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

I wish to apologise for the delay in issuing a response to your above question.

Due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and the numerous queries we have received to date it has taken longer than I would've liked to respond.

The HSE Covid-19 Testing and Tracing Service is committed to the timely provision of safe, accessible, quality swabbing services within the community setting. In order to respond to the pandemic it was necessary to utilise existing staff through rapid redeployment. Statistics regarding staff redeployment have been captured however due to the pace of this work at the outset of the pandemic, the dynamic nature of redeployments to address changing requirements (daily and weekly) and the limitations associated with HR data collection processes, information is not available in the format you are requesting.

I wish to advise that in September 2020 a total of 866 community staff were redeployed nationally. This figure includes all community based staff and is inclusive of Allied Health Professionals. A total of 690 which is 80% of redeployments are made up of three staff categories; Medical and Dental; Nursing; Health and Social Care Professionals, the latter group are the therapy grades. A total of 430 Health and Social Care Professionals are deployed to testing which makes up 50% of all community deployments. A total of 228 nursing staff are deployed to testing which is 26% of deployments. In addition, a total of 32 Medical and Dental Staff are deployed to Testing making up 4% of these deployments.

In March, the HSE redeployed existing staff into CHO community swabbing roles. Today our testing sites in the community are open 7 days a week and up to 12 hours per day. Approximately 800 staff are engaged in swabbing, with c. 350 working per day approximately. Staff have been redeployed from other community work into community swabbing. We are actively recruiting a dedicated workforce of community swabbers and have a live interview and job offer process ongoing. The recruitment campaign for community swabbers closed on Monday 21st September with just under 3,500 applications received and interviews commenced immediately and are rolling. It is anticipated that these new staff will be available to commence swabbing shortly, which will also allow many Allied Health Professional staff to return to their posts. To date over 500 people have passed interviews and are going through compliance checks, garda vetting etc. with the first new cohort of staff started on 8th October.

In September 2020 a total of 118 staff from CHOs were redeployed to Contact Tracing and Public Health Departments. The 118 come from 4 staff categories - Medical & Dental (18); Nursing (24); and Health and Social Care Professionals (53), Admin (23). There are currently eight contact tracing centres, working seven days per week and 12 hours per day. The recruitment campaign for contact tracers commenced on the 7th of September. We currently have a total of 581 staff available to work on routine contact tracing. Many of the staff initially redeployed to tracing have returned to their substantive posts as we have been recruiting for the last few months. HSE is continuing to recruit additional contact tracers.

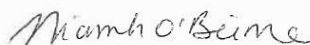
The recruitment campaign for contact tracers commenced on the 7th of September. Around 1,900 applications have been received so far and over 800 people have been interviewed. To date 274 new staff have been on-boarded, with a further 90 staff expected to be on-boarded by the end of this week. We will continue bringing in 60-70 new staff to the service every week over the coming period. The staff have been recruited on 11 month contracts for 37 hours per week, unless they requested part time hours. Level 2 tracers, which are those without a clinical background, are recruited at Clerical Officer grade, and Level 1 Tracers, which are those with a clinical background or the requisite experience, are recruited at Assistant Staff Officer grade. All staff will be rostered five days over seven, and their 37 hours will be between 8am and 8pm. The HSE plans to recruit up to 800 tracers, and then review the requirement for further recruitment.

Across Testing and Tracing therefore a total of 984 staff members have been redeployed from CHOs to Testing and Contact Tracing including Public Health departments who undertake complex contact tracing. This includes 483 staff members who are Health and Social Care Professionals representing 49% of CHO staff redeployments. Nursing Staff represent 252 which is 26% of those redeployed, and 50 Medical and Dental staff have been redeployed representing 5% of redeployments.

The future service model for testing and tracing is in the final stages of design with implementation underway for priority areas such as workforce recruitment and the test centre estate. This plan includes the recruitment of a permanent workforce in addition to leveraging the clinical and operational expertise embedded in our community services and this work has already commenced.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead for Testing and Tracing