



28 October 2020

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy O'Dowd,

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

PQ 30116/20

To ask the Minister for Health the level of national oversight that is in place and provided from HIQA and the HSE in view of the immediate medical support, advice and urgent assistance if required to nursing homes and congregated settings in which there are outbreaks of Covid-19 they can provide; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

It is important to distinguish the role of the HSE from that of the Regulator, Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), in relation to nursing homes, and in particular, in relation to the private and voluntary nursing home sector. The HSE does not have a legislative based authority specific to private and voluntary residential centres. The significant legislative base of responsibility in relation to this sector lies in the one hand with HIQA in relation to regulation, registration of services and investigations related to same, and to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for the purposes of agreeing contractual commitments for long term care services as outlined for the purposes of funding through the Nursing Home Support Scheme (NHSS).

HSE Oversight and Support

HSE Area Crisis Management Teams (ACMTs) were formed as a result of the Emergency Planning Framework (2006). The membership of ACMTs as outlined in the National Framework includes the senior decision maker of the Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) and Hospital Group, Environmental Health, Public Health, Health Business Services (HBS) Estates, National Ambulance Service, Communications, Procurement and Emergency Management. They in turn established Covid-19 Response Teams (CRTs).

Feedback and data from CHOs and Public Health indicated outbreaks centred mainly in older people services, both public and private. There are currently 576 nursing homes registered by HIQA in Ireland, with approximately 32,000 residential places (HIQA, July 2020). Nursing homes are operated by a mixture of private and voluntary (not for profit) providers, and the HSE. Private providers are by far the largest operator in the sector with approximately 80% of beds nationally. While the national average number of beds in nursing homes is just over 56, they range in size from as little as nine beds to the largest centre which has 184 beds.



Covid Response Teams (CRTs)

These teams were established to support Public Health Outbreak teams covering all residential services as well as Home Support settings. The HSE commenced this process on 27 March 2020 and this was underpinned subsequently as a necessary action by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) on 31 March 2020. Importantly these teams, (at least one per CHO) were formed to deal with the full range of residential care and could, if necessary, be flexibly enhanced with additional skillsets depending on where the outbreaks occurred. All CRTs are fully active providing on-going expert advice and support and a range of measures continue to be taken by the CRTs in response to requirements needed to support private nursing homes. Public Health and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) expert advice continue to be provided in the form of telephone advice, face to face training and visits to nursing home facilities to ensure nursing homes are compliant with HIQA IPC Standards.

The composition of the CRT's centred on specialist expertise for Older People and Residential care inclusive of Consultant Geriatricians, Directors of Nursing, Residential Care services, Public Health personnel, Nursing and administrative supports. Staff from local centres of nursing and midwifery education also supported any training requirements. The teams had capacity to provide telephone support, on-site visits and assessments, access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply lines, IPC and Public Health updated advice and training materials. They were provided with the operational direction to deploy resources as required and to escalate any concerns to the ACMT. The Covid-19 Response Teams were formally guided by The HSE COVID Residential Care/Home Support COVID Response Teams CRT Operational Guidance which issued on 9 April 2020, following the NPHE decision to do so.

While it is acknowledged the CRTs were originally established with a priority focus on services for older persons, the operationalization of these teams also involved support and provision of expert advice to Mental Health, Disability, Social Inclusion and Home Support Services through partnership and collaboration.

PPE Supply

The pace and scale of volume requirements for PPE to meet the needs of the healthcare system has been unprecedented. It is important to emphasize that through our collective efforts, arrangements to provide PPE to Healthcare Workers (HCWs) where and when they need it, have stabilised considerably. Through the centralised PPE procurement and distribution operations of HBS, the Irish healthcare system currently has strong availability of and access to PPE across all settings; and robust supply chains are well established. The HSE continues to receive significant levels of PPE, through previously committed purchasing arrangements, to meet our current health service demands. A process for sanctioning of new PPE orders is developed in conjunction with the Departments of Health and Public Expenditure.

We currently have strong stock levels across all categories of PPE within HBS national stock. It is a strategic priority for HBS Procurement that PPE is, and will continue to be, made available to healthcare settings at a scale commensurate with clinical guidance.

Appropriate processes and controls are in place as regards sourcing, management and usage of PPE and PPE is provided to a range of healthcare providers including private nursing homes.



Oifig an Cheannasaí Oibríochtaí & Feabhsúcháin Seirbhíse
Seirbhísí do Dhaoine Scothaosta

Office of the Head of Operations & Service Improvement
Services for Older People

Tel: 061 483245

Email: olderpeople.operations@hse.ie

I trust this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra Tuohy".

Sandra Tuohy

**Assistant National Director, Head of Operations & Service Improvement
Services for Older People**