



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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24th September 2020

Deputy Peadar Tóibín,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: peadar.toibin@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

The Health Service Executive 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 23051/20

To ask the Minister for Health when staff will be returned to their regular positions providing services to persons with disabilities in the community teams in which clinicians that normally provide services have been redeployed due to Covid-19 related work; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the situation has had a detrimental impact on the well-being and health of vulnerable persons requiring more hospital and accident and emergency visits than would normally be the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The presence and threat of COVID-19 in Ireland has resulted in significant challenges for service providers, families and most importantly, people with disabilities. During these challenging times disability services and supports such as residential services, day services, home supports, Personal Assistant supports, respite services and children's services were either suspended or delivered in alternative ways in line with Public Health guidance. The HSE is aware that the changes in service delivery have resulted in significant stressors being placed on families and individuals with disabilities across Ireland.

In the absence of regular, scheduled day services, respite supports and multidisciplinary supports, CHOs and service providers have tried to maintain services that can be delivered safely; providing outreach and telecare solutions, using technology where possible; and using creative and innovative models of care to support service users, both adults and children. The HSE was also mindful of the will and preference of people in terms of receiving services and in certain instances where personal choice was made to put these services on hold.

Under the governance of the HSE's National Integrated Operations Hub chaired by the Chief Operations Officer and work relating to vulnerable people, Disability Operations put a team in place with the responsibility for providing supports and capacity building training for the sector. A range of guidance material was developed to support people with disabilities, families and staff including;

- Alternative Models of Support (Non-Residential);
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for People with Disabilities and Carers;
- Streamlined Health Passport for people with disabilities who are admitted to hospital;

- Guidance on Use of PPE in Disability Services;
- Guidance for supporting adults in a community residence/at home;
- Guidance of supporting children in a community residence/at home;
- Support coordination in a pandemic; practical checklist to avoid stressors for service users;
- Interim Guidance on Conducting Assessments in Disability Services;
- Guidance to Support the Resumption of Children's Disability Services.

The FAQ, in particular, explained the pathway for supports for family carers and included dedicated guidance and advice on a range of issues relating to COVID-19 together with a list of local and national helpline numbers.

Central to the above, there has been continued engagement and liaison with National Disability Representative Bodies on behalf of Service Providers and Family/Service Users & Care Representation Groups representing the interest of service users, their families as well as provider organisations.

These forums work as a team, with each having specific and identified work streams, working through regular tele and video-conference. Taking this approach ensured two-way communication as well as establishing working groups with assigned tasks in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The Disability Operations Team Work Streams re COVID-19 undertook the following important measures;

- Engagement with Service Providers/Umbrella Organisations which involved co-ordination and communication between Community [Disability] Operations and the S38/39 Disability Representative Bodies;
- Guidance and Capacity Building for Vulnerable People which involved Design and Delivery of a National Sectoral 'Frontline Services' Support Programme aimed at Disability Services Supporting Vulnerable People;
- Re-assignment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) which involved the temporary assignment of SNAs to provide supports in Children's Disability Services during the school term and a further voluntary assignment during July / August;
- Engagement with Service Users and Families to act as a channel of communication to family representative organisations;
- Adapting Models of Support which involved developing alternative and innovative models of support for Vulnerable Children/ Young People & Adults (and their families) with a disability, experiencing prolonged periods of isolation;
- The Built Environment/Resources which involved monitoring and providing guidance, in conjunction with CHOs, regarding the use of new and existing capacity in disability services

Staff Redeployment

Effective redeployment of health service employees was a core element of the response in the HSE to COVID-19. Hospital groups and Community Health Organisations (CHOs) temporarily redeployed staff to support their business continuity plans, emerging services developing in direct response to COVID 19 and in response to the health and availability of staff in their own organisations. Many grades and categories of staff including clinicians were redeployed to other services such as the helplines, contact tracing, testing, public health, service support and other areas.

In the same way corporate and national services, together with Tusla, also made staff available to support the overall HSE effort during this time.

Having said that, some services continued with staff working with service users and their families remotely and using technology in new and effective ways.

The HSE acknowledges that during the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, it has not been possible to maintain full services including services provided by community teams. It has therefore, been difficult to

complete clinical assessments or provide interventions while maintaining social distancing and meeting health and safety requirements.

The HSE is fully committed to working in partnership with service providers to achieve maximum benefits for people with disabilities and their families, and aims to ensure that resources available are used in the most effective manner possible.

Resumption of Disability Services

In the context of the Governments Resilience & Recovery Framework (2020 – 2021), the HSE regards the provision of disability services as essential to maintaining a response to people with a disability. All disability services must follow public health guidance in this area, including the prevention and management of COVID-19 related infection. The HSE and its funded disability partners will continue to provide disability services in line with public health guidance and direction and having regard to the availability of staffing resources.

This must be supported by way of assurance and oversight from the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer along with the NPHET, so that we can do so in a safe manner. This means that services, whilst being delivered in new ways, will gradually be re-introduced to people with disabilities. Therefore clinicians will be required to revert to their substantive assignment as part of a planned and co-ordinated approach in each CHO.

Reference is drawn to the following HSE weblink which provides updates and guidance for disability service providers, including 'service resumption planning guidance'.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

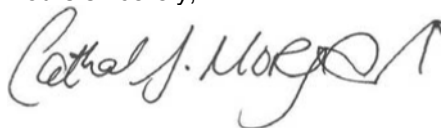
Attention is also drawn to the following important web links which provides up to date information resources in respect of COVID-19.

www.hspc.ie

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The HSE and Service Providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for people and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to restore services in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies and we will continue to work with service users and their families/carers to ensure that we achieve this aim.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**