



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Stiúirthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'
Baile Átha Cliath 8

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Neale Richmond , T.D.

6th October 2020

PQ 25435/20 To ask the Minister for Health if psychological supports are available, or will be made available for frontline staff that worked throughout the pandemic to cope with the effects it may have on their mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Neale Richmond

Dear Deputy,

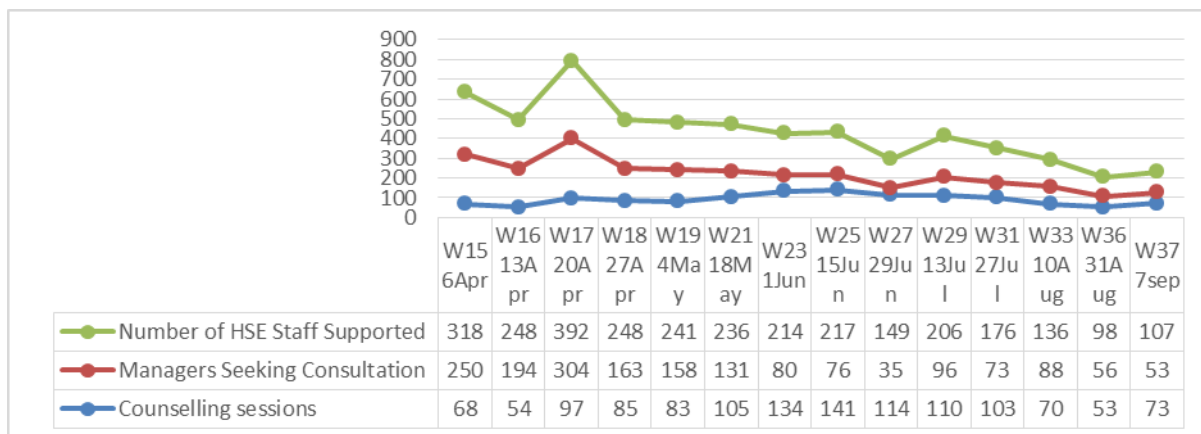
I refer to your recent parliamentary question as above, which was sent to the HSE for reply.

The Employee Assistance Programme is the primary HSE service delivering psychological support to health service staff. The Employee Assistance Programme is part of The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit (WHWU), a division of National HR. The WHWU has core responsibility for the implementation of employee safety, health and well-being governance, policies, standards and interventions, and takes a lead role of behalf of the organisation in supporting the safety, health and wellbeing of HSE healthcare workers. There is a formal reporting structure through which feedback is provided to the organisation on emerging trends and themes impacting the health and wellbeing of staff.

Psychological supports have been available to all health service staff who worked throughout the pandemic. Individualised, needs based direct psychological supports have been primarily provided by the Employee Assistance Programme.

The Employee Assistant Programmes & Counselling Services (EAP) have been providing and continue to provide supports to all HSE employees in the form of counselling sessions, consultation for managers on staff wellbeing issues, critical incident response, brief psychosocial support, guidance for managers supporting their staff's mental health, and bereavement support on the death of a colleague due to Covid-19.

- EAP National Team weekly data collection process was implemented starting on the 6th of April 2020. The National EAP Team has provided counselling/psychosocial support to 4691 HSE staff to date. The EAP Counsellor/Therapists have delivered 2316 structured video and telephone counselling sessions between the 6th of April and the 14th of September 2020. A total of 2481 advice and psychosocial phone consultations were required by line managers and service managers over this period. The National EAP Team spent a total of 2613 hours in Covid-19 related activity during this period.



Graph: Reported National EAP Team Weekly activity

Main themes and trends collated in EAP interaction with HSE staff

- Work-place conflict, work-related stress, interpersonal issues
- Bullying, assault at work, trust in care process, disciplinary process, injury at work
- Personal stress, relationship break-up, bereavement
- Childhood issues, addiction, anxiety/depression, disrupted sleep, health issues (e.g. Chronic pain)
- Burnout/exhaustion due to pandemic (usual ways of coping not working), constant fear of second wave

National EAP Team provides support to HSE staff in the forms of:

- Staff wellbeing direct supports
- Increasing awareness among services of EAP service and psychosocial supports offered
- Promoting Staff Mental Health information
- Return to work planning within Health and Safety Guidelines
- In addition to the above, National Psychosocial Response framework for Covid-19 is providing an integrated framework of psychosocial supports using a layered care approach to ensure HCWs will receive the type of stress or trauma support they need, when they need it. This ranges from preventive measures like brief psychological first aid and peer support, to higher level supports like EAP counselling or referral into other specialist mental health services.
- The pandemic research clearly shows that a small proportion of people will experience PTSD. Most staff are very resilient and will not experience this. For those staff who may experience it, they have ready access to therapy through the EAP counselling service, including to trauma therapies. Necessary levels of support will be available to staff experiencing particularly difficult psychological circumstances.
- **Stress Control Program** : HSE, Health & Wellbeing Stress Control on-line programme was promoted and broadcasted at planned intervals in April, May and June. The programme is free of charge. stresscontrol.org to register. With an average viewership of nearly 7,000 per week programme proved very popular with Irish audiences who joined an online community to learn ways to tackle the increase in worry and stress we are all feeling. This programme aims to provide easy access to practical information for anyone who may be feeling anxious or stressed at this time. Programme resources are available to download free of charge and include booklets and relaxation and mindfulness tools to support people to try various strategies to find what works for them.

Information, posters and infographics, and leaflets for HSE staff and line managers provided by WHWU (available on the HSE website) to date include:

Staff self-care: Guidance and messaging developed maximising local and national coverage on:

- managing fatigue during Covid-19.
- managing sleep during Covid-19.
- building positive and supportive relationships among healthcare workers during Covid-19
- psychosocial wellbeing tips for employees working in call centre locations.
- Minding your Mental Health for HSE staff
- Managing Stress.
- Interim Guidance for Coronavirus - Healthcare Worker Management by Occupational Health.
- Guidance on Safe return to work for HCWs which can be viewed here.
- dedicated National Helpline for Healthcare Workers for COVID-19
- the unit has also had direct engagement through local networks of HR managers, Occupational Health, service managers, ADONs/ DONs, etc. with regard to
- Healthcare Workers Affected by Death in Service of a Colleague due to COVID-19.
- individual referral to Occupational Health Services for fitness for work advice
- provision of psychosocial support to HSE staff in self-isolation, including Return to Work
- responding to complex psychosocial risks in the workplace, through a range of interventions including:
 - stress management and the identification and clarification of work-related stressors
 - working directly with HSE services reducing healthcare worker exposure to WRS
 - interventions to identify where change has had negative impact on teams.
 - team based approaches to support team wellness and team self-care.
 - collaborative work with wider HR and HSE services to address and respond to complex workplace psychosocial risks.
- **Occupational Health** services are providing specialised medical advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19 and management of healthcare workers provide expertise to Management and Healthcare Workers on Covid-19 infection. They manage testing and contact tracing for healthcare workers and provide information and support to healthcare workers, who have been identified as casual or close 'contacts', or who have been confirmed to have COVID-19 infection.
- **Health and Safety** advice and information is being provided to healthcare workers on matters such as social distancing at work, travelling for work, returning to work, working from home. Among the many aspects of these services, is the Healthcare Worker Covid-19 Helpline which provides advice and support to healthcare workers from across the wider health family. The helpline has provided occupational support to over 13,696 healthcare workers in the period March and July.
- **Organisational Health** supports for managers are being provided including issuance of guidance on building good manager/employee relationships, good practice guidance for healthcare staff in managing fatigue and sleep, stress management, and self-care.

Yours sincerely



Marie O Sullivan
Office of the National Director for Human Resources