



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Office of the Chief Clinical Officer
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Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Cliniúil
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BY EMAIL ONLY

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice

Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

7th April 2021

PQ 17770-21 To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE is advising students who are currently in their final semester of college and on placement within a HSE setting that they will not be allowed to remain on placement unless they are vaccinated despite this vaccination not being mandatory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -

Dear Deputy Fitzmaurice

The HSE's duty of care is firstly to patients and has an obligation to do all that it can to ensure the safety of patients cared for in HSE facilities. Unfortunately a large number of patients in hospitals and nursing homes have acquired COVID in those facilities. COVID is spread almost exclusively by exposure to an infectious person. In the healthcare context, a person who is the source of patient infection may be another patient, a staff member or indeed a student who is infectious. The person may have no symptoms and may not know that they are infectious. We have also seen a very large number of staff exposed to COVID-19 in HSE facilities develop infection. Some have become very seriously ill. Students are also at risk.

The vaccination of staff has had a dramatic effect in reducing COVID disease in healthcare workers and others exposed to risk of COVID in a healthcare setting. With respect to students the HSE has made a distinction between those senior students (fourth year student nurses) who are part of the workforce and who are essential to delivery of care and other students who are there to learn rather than to deliver care.

In Ireland we have a very fine tradition whereby most patients, pro bono, grant health and social care students the privilege of their time, the story of the most intimate details of their life and permission to practice their skills whilst caring for them. Those students granted this privilege owe a special duty of care to the patients who in good faith allow those students this access. Many of these patients are extremely vulnerable and are at high risk of death if they develop COVID-19. Against this background it is not reasonable that patients should be asked to grant this privilege of access to students who place their personal preference with respect to vaccine above their duty to protect those to whom they owe so much.

Over the past year the HSE has done everything possible to sustain clinical placements for healthcare students in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. The HSE has supported students with provision of access to training materials, personal protective and vaccination as frontline healthcare workers. The vast majority of healthcare students, knowing what they owe to their patient benefactors have done everything that they can do to minimise the risk that they pose to patients. In their own interest, in the interest of their colleagues and the patients they learn from the vast majority of students have been keen to get vaccinated as quickly as possible. As above the HSE has only withdrawn access to

HSE clinical facilities from students who have no medical contraindication to vaccination (they are eligible for vaccination), who have been offered vaccination and who have refused vaccination. The HSE has advised the Higher Education Authorities that students who are eligible for vaccination, that have been offered vaccination and who decline vaccination cannot be assigned to clinical placements in HSE facilities. This may be reviewed as the pandemic situation evolves. Participation in vaccination programmes in Ireland is not mandatory.

I hope this provides you with assistance,

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Walsh', written in a cursive style.

Pp

Sharon Hayden
General Manager
Office of the CCO