



Réada Cronin TD
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

26th March 2021

PQ 6310/21

“To ask the Minister for Health his plans to substantially increase the number of accredited psychotherapists and counsellors for public health patients in the State given the dearth extant and the greater need due to Covid-19 and particularly as this relates to services for north County Kildare both for adults and children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Réada Cronin”

Dear Deputy Cronin,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (Reference 6310/21), which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE is working to ensure timely access for children and adults requiring psychology services. The HSE is committed to delivering efficient high quality psychology services to all eligible service users. In 2020 a total of 41,800 children and adult patients were seen by psychology services. At January 2021 there were 297 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) psychologists of all grades in Primary Care compared to 296 WTE at January 2020. There are currently 16 active recruitment campaigns for psychology posts in Primary Care at various grades across the country. With specific regard to north County Kildare, a temporary Psychology post regrettably remains vacant due to an inability to successfully recruit to the post

The HSE National Counselling Service (NCS) provides a range of Counselling/Psychotherapy services and is available in all Community Healthcare areas including Kildare. The NCS has continued to provide a full service through Tele-health during the pandemic. Clients have the option of availing of Structured Telephone Counselling (STC) or Online Video Counselling (OVC). Due to public health restrictions capacity for face to face appointments is limited at present.

- The NCS employs qualified, accredited and experienced Counsellor/Therapists to provide services for the following groups:
Counselling and Psychotherapy for Adults who experienced childhood abuse or neglect (CaPA)
- Counselling for Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes
- Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) (CIPC provides time limited counselling to to adults over 18 years who are medical card holders and experiencing mild to moderate psychological and emotional difficulties.

In addition, several digital mental health interventions are provided to support individuals experiencing poor mental health during this pandemic.

1. 24/7 mental health information and signposting services are provided using www.yourmentalhealth.ie or www.Spunout.ie where over 2 million visits to the sites in 2020.
2. HSE provided additional free online counselling nationally through MyMind and Turn2Me.
3. Silvercloud was provided with funding to develop online cognitive behaviour therapy programmes in self-guided mode.
4. The HSE fund the *text50808* service which launched in June 2020. The service provides emotional support to anyone experiencing a crisis through engagement in a text message 'conversation' with a trained and supervised volunteer. In 2020, there were over 33,000 text conversations and the service has grown to an average of over 5,000 conversations per month.

In addition to further rolling out the interventions highlighted above, the HSE is about to commence the roll-out of 1,000 licenses for therapist-supported online CBT in 2021.

These initiatives are providing much needed evidence based supports to individuals in need of low to moderate mental health support. In addition, HSE has funded many existing NGO's to engage in online and telephone counselling services in relation to eating disorders, addiction and bereavement.

To address the current third wave of Covid infections there was a requirement to prioritise the level of services delivered during this period. Building upon the experience from earlier waves of the pandemic, Community Services have developed a prioritisation framework to support local decisions to be made on service prioritisation. This approach will ensure that services will be focused on identifying and supporting patients who have the greatest need and enabling staff to be deployed where necessary to support these patients. Where services are curtailed or reduced, this will be in line with clinical approval, a shared national position and with an appropriate risk assessment and communication with providers, service users and families. It is the intention of Community Services that full services would return as soon as is safe and practicable.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely



TJ Dunford

Head of Operations; Primary Care.

Community Operations.