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Deputy Thomas Gould, TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

RE: PQ 8774/21

To ask the Minister for Health the services in place or planned for those persons suffering with long Covid

Dear Deputy Gould,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the above parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Information on novel Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by SARS-COV-2 infection, its features and clinical course are only emerging. COVID-19 is a multi-system infection and may affect people in different ways. One would usually expect people to make a full recovery over time.

Specific guidance on what has been referred to as the “long-tail” is presently under development both here and internationally, as health systems continue to learn about COVID-19 and its complications. Prolonged symptoms post COVID-19 are increasingly being described and there is no doubt that some people experience very debilitating symptoms.

People who have had COVID-19 are being followed up by their doctors, as appropriate. This is usually their GP. A British Medical Journal (BMJ) Practice document entitled “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19); straight to the point” (attached), advocates assessment and work up in primary care, incorporating a holistic evaluation to rule out co-morbid conditions or complications and to provide supportive care (page 129 of the attached BMJ document).

While the literature to date would suggest that supportive post-acute COVID-19 care in the primary care setting is appropriate, it is likely that there will be a small subset of patients requiring specialist assessment. In instances where patients require hospitalisation and/or ITU admission, this is hospital-based. Some hospitals have established follow-up services, mainly led by Infectious Disease.

Clinical Leads for HSE's National Clinical Programme for Infectious Disease are engaging with Primary Care, with a view to developing evidence-based pathways for post COVID-19 care. Medical management is supportive and symptom-directed.

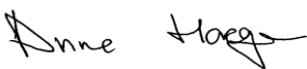
All health services internationally are continually learning of the long-term effects of COVID-19 infection on patients. Challenges faced include efforts to enable health systems to deal with these unprecedented demands within the existing availability and capacity of people, processes and systems. The pandemic currently has a significant impact on HSE's ability to deliver the full range of services to the public. There is significant pressure on the acute system, due to increased hospitalisation and the resources required to provide patient care.

It is acknowledged that patients discharged after severe COVID-19 infection, as well as those who were not hospitalised, need a suitable level of clinical support, care and follow-up pathways within the community setting. A HSE Clinical Subgroup was recently established. It aims to provide recommendations regarding post-acute COVID-19 management and pathways for such patients. The HSE has also engaged with a group of people who are suffering post-acute COVID-19 symptoms and is continually exploring appropriate supports as part of the overall health service response to COVID-19.

A summary of emerging clinical evidence regarding long COVID-19 and post-acute COVID-19 and available evidence on the management of these patients was published in January 2021 and is available online at the HSE National Health Library and Knowledge Service website at <https://hselibrary.ie/what-is-the-latest-evidence-about-the-existence-of-long-covid-or-post-covid-and-its-persistence-for-covid-19-survivors-what-evidence-is-currently-available-on-the-management-of-patients-who-have-post/>

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Anne Horgan
General Manager