



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Ceannasaí Náisiúnta Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte  
Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin Baile Phámar Baile Átha Cliath 20.

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11<sup>th</sup> February 2021  
Deputy Róisín Shortall,  
Dail Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

PQ Number 4931/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of hospital admissions for eating disorders in each month over the past year; the projected impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on eating disorder prevalence; the reason the full spending allocated to eating disorders was not used in 2018, 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Shortall,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of 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.

Most people can and do get better from eating disorders. While a small number of people benefit from more intensive treatment through day programmes or inpatient care, the most effective treatment setting is in the community. Dedicated community based eating disorder services, where multidisciplinary teams have specialist training can provide evidence based care and treatment.

The HSE approved the Eating Disorder Model of Care (MOC) in January 2018. The MOC is the blue print for the HSE to roll out specialist eating disorder services in Ireland to address the current unmet need for specialist eating disorder service within HSE. Outpatient specialist care is considered to be the most effective treatment setting for most people with eating disorders. The MOC has a core focus on developing regional community based specialist eating disorder services provided by skilled multidisciplinary teams.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/mental-health/eating-disorders/moc/hse-eating-disorder-services-model-of-care.pdf>

The 3 ED Community teams are community based and not hospital based. There is no MH data collection system by diagnosis. The NCP Eating Disorders are engaged with OCIO and are awaiting a decision on a business case submitted to develop a data system that will track patients over time.

I attach the following data; HRB (psychiatric inpatient reporting), HIPE (acute hospital system) for information relating to hospital admissions and the National Clinical Programme 'story so far'.



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An increase in eating disorder presentations in the context of the COVID pandemic is being reported both in Ireland and internationally for all ages. Research to date has shown this is due to a combination of factors including : isolation & loneliness with restrictions, food insecurity, anxiety re exposure to frequent COVID related news , exposure to triggering messages including possible lack of food supply to supermarkets, increased carer and family pressures, lack of structure and routine with school closures and home working, and reduced contact with mental health services. People with eating disorders are presenting more unwell than previously seen and includes all types (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant restrictive food intake disorder). The 3 specialist eating disorder teams have seen significant increases in referrals in 2020 compared to 2019 and this expected to continue into 2021. Paediatric hospital and acute hospitals are reporting similar rises in acute presentations of eating disorders.

Since 2016 €5.7 million has been made available for Eating Disorder posts through programme for government funding. Of that €1.77 million has been invested to date in Eating Disorder Specialist Posts (see table below). In 2020 unspent mental health development funding was required to meet unfunded cost growth in mental health services. As a result, nationally planned developments of eating disorder services had to be temporarily paused. Some of the paused funding was used for agency staffing (both medical and nursing) and to facilitate specialist placements for those with complex mental health needs including eating disorders. This was done in consultation with the Department of Health. In 2021 the balance of €3.94 million is now available to be invested in specialist Eating Disorder services. It is the intention of the HSE to progress the recruitment of these eating disorder specialist posts in 2021 and there are no plans to divert this available funding to other areas of service provision.

Eating Disorder Funding - Posts filled by year as at Jan 21

|          | Filled in 2017 | Filled in 2018 | Filled in 2019 | Filled in 2020 | TOTAL     |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| PFG 2016 | 220,545        | 471,222        | 698,310        | 81,151         | 1,471,228 |
| PFG 2017 |                | 79,272         | 84,104         |                | 163,376   |
| PFG 2018 |                | 137,953        |                |                | 137,953   |
| PFG 2019 |                |                |                |                | -         |
| TOTAL    | 220,545        | 688,447        | 782,414        | 81,151         | 1,772,557 |

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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Dr Sinead Reynolds  
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