



24/03/2021

Deputy Matt Carthy, TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy Carthy,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following Parliamentary Question, which was submitted to this Department for response.

PQ 13074/21

To ask the Minister for Health if there is an obligation on homecare providers to inform the families when the carers of patients are found to have contracted Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Home Support Services are an important component of the provision of service to older people with assessed needs and to support them in their choice of living in their own home and community. The spread of COVID-19 throughout our communities has posed significant challenges for many areas of our Older Person's Services, including Home Support Services and as the country moves through the phases of Government restrictions, the HSE continues to work closely with providers and community staff to identify where service is most required. This is to ensure, insofar as possible, that Home Support Services can continue where needed most.

At present, Home Support Services are not currently regulated. However, there are contractual arrangements that Approved Home Support Providers must meet in line with the 2018 HSE Tender, now extended to run until 31 December 2021. As part of the service level agreement in place with a range of private providers, the HSE has developed key performance indicators which operate with reference to HIQA's Quality Standards. This includes quality standards in terms of governance and accountability, person-centred care, complaints management, training and qualifications. It is the duty of the service provider to provide services to the minimum required specifications as outlined in the service agreement.

At the NPHET meeting of 31st March 2020 a series of Public Health measures to be implemented across the community including in Long Term Residential Care (LTRC) and Home Support were agreed, and these measures included the agreement of protocols for enhanced family communications in the context of any COVID-19 transmissions.

Under current service arrangements together with the measures set out by NPHET, all Providers who have contractual arrangements in place with the HSE, must maintain efficient communications with family members of service users at all times, but particularly in the context of COVID-19 related cases. In addition, the HSE COVID-19 Response Teams and Public Health officials continue to provide support and assistance during any confirmed outbreaks across Home Support services.

The HSE has issued Guidance for Health and Social Care Workers who visit homes. This guidance is to help home support staff and personal assistants to take the best possible infection prevention and control measures to protect the people they care for and themselves. Good hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental hygiene remain critical to minimise the risk to staff and patients/clients of the transmission of COVID-19.

It is available on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website at:

- a. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/>
- b. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/healthandsocialcareworkers/>

Furthermore, the HSE continues to supply appropriate PPE to HSE directly employed home support staff and to Approved Home Support Providers for their home support staff to use in accordance with current Public Health and is supplied through the PPE supply chain established at local level. Guidance on the use of PPE is available at:

- c. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/Current%20recommendations%20for%20use%20of%20Personal%20Protective%20Equipment.pdf>

The HSE acknowledges the valuable role of carers and families, home support workers and providers across the services in supporting older people and their care groups throughout this challenging period.

The Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop a new stand-alone, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services. Developing a new statutory scheme will be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner for all those who need home support services.

Yours sincerely



Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director
Services for Older People – Operations