



15th April 2021

Holly Cairns TD
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 16975/21

“To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the waiting lists for occupational therapists given 11,023 children have been waiting at least one year for their first assessment with an occupational therapist, including 1,727 in the Cork and Kerry regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Holly Cairns”

Dear Deputy Cairns,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (Reference 16975/21), which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE is working to ensure timely access to children requiring occupational therapy services and to reduce waiting times for this important service. The HSE is committed to delivering efficient high quality occupational therapy services to all eligible service users. In the full year 2020 a total of 310,153 children and adults were seen by HSE Occupational Therapy services. The figures quoted in your question (which relate to children aged 5 –17 years) relate to December 2020 data and since then the figure for the same category has reduced by 8.5% to 10,084 (as per February 2021 data).

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare

Children with or without a medical card or long term illness card, can be referred directly to the paediatric occupational therapy service in Primary Care.

All referrals are prioritised for initial assessment and then, depending on the outcome of clinical assessments, children are waitlisted for the appropriate intervention. Children are seen for intervention, in line with their assessed need and where clinically indicated, within the available resources.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, occupational therapy service waiting list at the end of February, 2021 is as follows:

CHO 4	0 - 4 yrs. 11 months	5- 17 yrs. 11 months	Total
CKCH	> 52 weeks	> 52 weeks	> 52 weeks
Kerry	11	370	381
North Cork	25	252	277
North Lee	24	563	587
South Lee	13	230	243
West Cork	13	181	194
CHO4 Total	86	1596	1682

Occupational Therapists have been among the cohort of staff redeployed to assist with COVID 19 related work March 2020 through to February 2021, and as a result this has lengthened waiting. Services have been incrementally resuming face to face to appointments services post the third covid wave. The numbers of appointments are restricted to achieve compliance public health guide-lines and safety considerations for staff and patients during the on-going Covid pandemic.

New ways of working to address children’s needs in a more timely manner were already under development prior to Covid-19 as part of a waitlist initiative e.g. Parent Training Groups. These new pathways will continue to be rolled out. In addition services are using tele-health systems to provide services, where appropriate in lieu of face to face interventions.

Waiting lists are being validated to ensure that only those who wish to receive service remain on the waiting list. Requests to fill vacant posts are also being progressed with HBS Recruitment. Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has also completed a submission for additional resource to address Covid related backlog and awaits national feedback.

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.