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Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD

Dáil Éireann

Leinster House

Dublin 2

PQ ref 56314/21 To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that investing in more neurology nurses in the health service is a cost efficient way of improving the efficiency of outpatient clinics, reducing waiting times and ensuring that patients have access to the specialist support they need to manage their conditions; and his views on the current low numbers employed in the hospital network.

Dear Deputy Ó Snodaigh,

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.

Response:

Nurse specialists play important role in triaging, assessing, and providing ongoing support to neurological patients. This in turn builds capacity within neurological services and allows for more timely access to efficient, equitable and quality care. The National Clinical Programme for Neurology (NCPN) recognizes this significant contribution and has strongly advocated for additional nurse specialists as outlined below.

NCPN in conjunction with the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) completed an all-Ireland survey of neurological services in 2020. This survey highlighted that although all neurological centers have access to a designated clinical nurse specialist and/or advanced nurse practitioner, the total number of neurology nurse specialists are significantly below what is recommended by International Guidelines and the recommendations contained within the Model of Care 2016. There is also geographical inequity in terms of the distribution of neurology nurse specialists, with the West and Southwest of the country having a lower ratio of nurses per capita. NCPN recognizes the need to address this deficit to provide efficient, quality care that be accessed in a timely and equitable manner.

NCPN submitted New Service Development Estimates for an additional 16 clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practitioners in 2022, across different specialties and hospital groups. NCPN is currently awaiting the outcome of this estimates process. If successful, these additional posts will initially address the areas of greatest geographical inequity and the subspecialties that are most in need of additional nurse specialists. Plans to incrementally increase overall number of nurse specialists will then be developed to address the remaining deficit of nurse specialists.

NCPN recognizes the value that skilled and high trained nursing staff add to neurological services. It has endeavored to endorse this by focusing its current work streams and initiatives around nurse led clinics, nurse liaison services and outreach programs. Examples of this include the Headache Programme and Epilepsy Outreach Programme, both funded under the Slaintecare Innovation Fund. These programs reconfigure the management of these conditions, enabling clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practitioners to lead and coordinate the care of these conditions in the community. This reduces reliance on consultant neurologists and tertiary services, in turn reducing waiting lists, allowing more timely access to services, and improving the overall quality of care.

Finally, NCP continues to engage regularly with patient organizations and the NAI to establish ways to promote and advocate for neurology nurse specialists.

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Benton

General Manager

Acute Operations