



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte
Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'
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Mattie Mc Grath T.D.

8th December, 2021

PQ 57796/21 To ask the Minister for Health if he plans to introduce a redress scheme to support healthcare staff who have suffered adverse reactions following vaccination or who have suffered from Covid-19 and who have been left unable to work; the avenues of support that are available to such staff; the number of staff that have been redeployed to other services due to being unable to carry out their usual duties due to health concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Mattie McGrath

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your recent parliamentary question above which was sent to the HSE for reply.

The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit (WHWU), a division of National HR, provide a range of expertise, advice and supports to healthcare staff and managers.

Occupational Health

The focus is on the provision of specialised medical advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19 and management of healthcare workers. The following guidance on Covid-19 has been issued and is updated in line with public health advice:

- ✓ Interim Guidance for Coronavirus - Healthcare Worker Management by Occupational Health
- ✓ Guidance on Pregnant Healthcare Workers (HCWs), Vulnerable HCWs and HCW with Other Pre-Existing Disease
- ✓ Guidance on Testing and Return to Work.
- ✓ Guidance on Derogation for the return to work of Healthcare Workers
- ✓ Leaflets for 'Essential' HCWs returning to work on active or passive monitoring.

All advice for HCW is on line under Occupational Health on the HPSC page at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplace-health-and-wellbeing-unit/covid-19-guidance/guidance-on-fitness-for-work-of-healthcare-workers-in-the-higher-risk-categories.pdf>

Employee Assistant Programme

The HSE Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is a free confidential support service that aims to provide the right wellbeing supports and interventions for staff and service managers, at the right time. These services include:

- EAP counselling for personal and work-related issues
- psychosocial support
- critical incident stress management (CISM) response
- manager consultation on staff wellbeing issues.

HSE staff have put in an immense effort in response to Covid, working long hours to support patients and colleagues alike. HSE staff are quite resilient and have adapted well to the challenges of redeployment and

remote working. However, this period has seen an increase in demand for EAP supports with staff reporting higher levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue.

EAP has continued to provide staff counselling, psychosocial support and manager consultations. EAP has responded to changing staff needs by implementing new online services like video and telephone counselling. In addition, a new national EAP phone line (0818 327 327) has been set to provide easier access. The service has also increased the number of EAP counsellors available nationwide and launched the EAP Inspire Support Hub which gives access to a range of high quality wellbeing resources that can be accessed 24/7.

Staff wellbeing direct supports includes:

- Phone and video counselling sessions with existing and newly referred clients.
- Individual psychosocial support - calls from both managers and staff seeking consultation on wellbeing issues (anxiety, fear, personal and workplace stress)
- EAP provide 1:1 workplace counselling and group debriefing for staff

All information available for staff on the Employee Assistance Programme is available at <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/benefits/counselling.html>

In January 2021, the HSE published the [HSE Psychosocial Response to Covid-19](#), a next stage planning document on how to mitigate against the longer term implications and sustainably support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of the public and healthcare workers, for the duration of Covid-19 and the post emergency term.

The report sets out an integrated framework of psychosocial supports using a layered care approach to ensure Health Care Workers will receive the type of stress, or trauma, support they need, when they need it. This ranges from preventive and early intervention measures like psychological first aid and peer support, to higher level supports like EAP counselling for HSE staff, or referral into other specialist mental health services. HSE staff have ready access to therapy through the EAP counselling service, including to trauma therapies.

Each local Community Health Organisation offers a number of key supports including a Psychological First Aid (PFA) Call Back Service for healthcare workers and some targeted groups of the public, who may be feeling stressed or anxious about the impact of Covid-19. Trained psychosocial responders will provide a telephone contact to help callers to cope with the daily challenges at this time.

The responders aim is to listen, to acknowledge people's challenges and help people get back on track. The responder will also recommend resources and signpost callers to additional supports if required.

Additional supports for staff on minding their mental here is available on <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/coronavirus/health-and-wellbeing/minding-your-mental-health.html>

Health & Safety

The HSE has fully embraced the Government's "Work Safely Protocol" (November 2020) and the earlier "Return to Work Safely" protocol which was first published in May 2020. A number of supports and initiatives have been put in place to support the implementation of this protocol including:

- Dedicated COVID-19 Occupational Safety and Health web-page:
- Staff Helpline: 1850 420420

The suite of COVID-19 specific documents includes those on:

- Key Roles and Appointment of LWR - (process for appointment of LWR was negotiated and agreed with Unions)
- Social distancing
- Working Safety
- Remote working
- Staff travelling
- Manual handling Training
- Risk assessments applying to specific services

Infection Control Guidance is provided through HPSC and AMRIC. With regard to PPE provision and Fit Testing Specific procurement exercises to source supply with a Fit testing programme is in place under WHWU.

The following PPPG are considered authoritative within the HSE and are given life through the Corporate Safety Statement and other existing policies including:

- Corporate Safety Statement
- Biological Agents Policy
- Manual Handling Policy
- Integrated Risk Management Policy
- Site Specific Safety Statement Template

During 2020 all HSE OSH policies were reviewed taking COVID-19 into consideration. The policy on the Management of Biological Agents has been twice updated by the National Health and Safety Function and reflects the requirements set out in the new HSA 2020 Biological Agents Code of Practice and sets a number of outcomes:

- A safer working environment for employees and others who fall under the scope of this policy by providing a framework for managing exposure to biological agents.
- Clear roles and responsibilities of responsible persons are clearly outlined.
- The incorporation of the management of biological agents into the risk assessment process.
- There is clear guidance on preventative and protective measures, containment measures and containment levels to minimise the risks associated with exposure to biological agents
- Clear guidance on the requirements for incident management and reporting to the Health and Safety Authority.

Training

The above documents and resources are supported by a suite of on-line training modules (all available on HSEland) as follows:

- Module 1 - COVID-19 – Induction/Return to Work Webinar
- Module 2 – COVID-19 - Return to Work Safely Webinar (for Managers)
- Module 3 – COVID-19 - Lead Worker Representative Webinar
- HSA - Managing Health & Safety in Healthcare, Biological Agents Hazards
- Risk Assessment Training Workshop (currently in development – due for launch)

Please note that many of the HSE's statutory OSH training modules are now available on-line. This is of great assistance during periods of government restrictions, when people are working from home.

All Health and Safety guidance and information for staff is available at <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/health-and-safety/>

The National Health and Safety Helpdesk is available on 1850 420 420.

Organisational Health

Organisational Health provide expert advice, guidance, and support on work and organisational wellbeing; and psychosocial risks in the workplace. The division also works collaboratively with EAP and Health and Safety to support the organisation's psychosocial response including responding to referrals for support from managers on complex psychosocial risks in the workplace through work and organisational psychology interventions e.g:

- stress management and the identification and clarification of work-related stressors (WRS);
- interventions to reduce risk and resolving interpersonal conflict (including historical conflict) within teams
- conducting psychosocial risk assessment in the workplace
- Webinars on 'Managing Stress during Covid-19 - a support programme for Managers' and "Working in Challenging Work Environment - guidance and support for all healthcare workers".

Organisation Health assist teams in the post-incident phase: the practitioner can work with the team to identify an intervention that will mitigate complex psychosocial risks and facilitate the team in identifying solutions and finding resolution to the complex psychosocial risks including the development of an action plan (work programme) for the service and team to implement post incident. As part of the intervention, risks can be explored within team discussion groups and include in the action plan the 'leaning' for the team and service going forward.

In addition, the 'Support your staffs' mental health: a programme for HSE mangers' on-line training programme available on HSEland.

The service has also developed a range of guidance and info-graphics to support managers and healthcare workers:

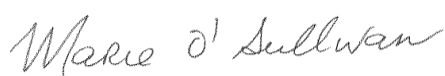
- Managing Fatigue and Exhaustion
- Managing Sleep
- Managing Sleep with Shift Work
- Wellbeing Tips for Healthcare Workers working in Call Centres
- Building Positive Relationships between Healthcare Workers and Managers
- 'Return to Work: supporting Healthcare workers during this transition Covid-19' – a guidance document including checklists for managers on best practice for engagement, managing expectations and signposting to supports

All for staff in information on policy, training, benefits and services for staff around COVID-19 is available at <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/coronavirus/>

All of the above services are outlined in the Case Study Vignette developed with the WHO Europe Office which contributed to the recent Regional Committee meeting. The case study reveals how all the areas of Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit have worked in a collaborative and integrated way to support staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Vignette is available at this link:

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Health-systems/primary-health-care/country-work/primary-health-care-country-vignettes/ireland-promoting-the-health-and-well-being-of-the-health-and-care-workforce-2021>

Yours sincerely,



Marie O'Sullivan
National HR