



Oifig an Stiúirthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte

Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'

Baile Átha Cliath 8

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Colm Burke T.D.

14th December, 2021

PQ 58961/21 - To ask the Minister for Health the actions taken to acknowledge the gravity of the strain that has been placed upon staff in nursing homes and the broader health services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Colm Burke

PQ 58962/21 To ask the Minister for Health the appropriate supports the Government plans to bring into effect to support staff in nursing homes and the broader health services in living with the lasting effects of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Colm Burke

PQ58958/21 To ask the Minister for Health if the Government has recognised the high levels of post-traumatic stress, mood disturbance and moral injury that an organisation (details supplied) has identified amongst nursing home staff during the Covid-19 pandemic and which need to be incorporated into planning supports for this workforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Colm Burke

PQ58960/21 To ask the Minister for Health the level of funding that has been provided to help deliver employee assistance programmes or other counselling programmes to the nursing home staff that are dealing with post traumatic effects of the Covid-19 emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Colm Burke

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your recent parliamentary questions above which was sent to the HSE for reply. As there is a common thread in these PQs – we are providing one answer to the 4 PQs in order to provide a broad and comprehensive response to the Deputy.

To advise that the HSE can only respond to the Deputy for healthcare settings within the HSE. We cannot comment or provide responses in relation to non-HSE healthcare settings and staff.

HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit promote health, safety and wellbeing of HSE staff by providing support for all HSE staff, and assisting in preventing staff becoming ill or injured as a result of all hazards including biological hazards such as COVID-19, and returning them safely to work after an illness or injury. Supports and services provided by HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit are not available to non-HSE healthcare workers.

HSE Staff Supports are provided through a number of channels: Occupational Health Services (OHS) including Rehabilitation and Case Management; the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Organisational Health; and the National Health and Safety Function.

The Employee Assistance Programme is the primary HSE service delivering psychological support to health service staff. The Employee Assistance Programme is part of The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit (WHWU), a division of National HR. The WHWU has core responsibility for the implementation of employee safety, health and well-being governance, policies, standards and interventions, and takes a lead role of behalf of the organisation in supporting the safety, health and wellbeing of HSE healthcare workers. There is a formal reporting structure through which feedback is provided to the organisation on emerging trends and themes impacting the health and wellbeing of staff.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is a free, confidential and independent service for all HSE staff. The service, which keeps the highest standard of confidentiality, is open to all HSE staff who can self-refer to the programme at any time, and do not need permission or approval.

Given the context of the current climate and challenges faced by HSE staff, the EAP service has engaged in an EAPandME awareness raising campaign over recent months to help staff combat feelings of helplessness and overwhelm. HSE staff can access EAP via a single national number from anywhere in the country. EAP provides staff counselling, psychosocial support and manager consultations. EAP has responded to the changing staff needs by implementing new online services like video and telephone counselling. In addition, a new national EAP phone line was introduced for easier access; increased the number of EAP counsellors available nationwide; and launched the new EAP Inspire Support Hub which gives access to a range of high-quality wellbeing resources that can be accessed 24/7. Inspire have 400 counsellor therapists available to respond to calls, which has translated into faster access for HSE staff when using the external service.

An additional €1m of funding was secured in 2020, with a further €3m in 2021 to further strengthen the capacity and capability of OHS, EAP and the National Health and Safety Function through the recruitment of additional staff during 2021; securing new modern premises in Cork and Blanchardstown; and the opening of a new Staff Health and Wellbeing centre in University Hospital Limerick.

Occupational Health services provide specialised medical advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19 and management of healthcare workers. Occupational Health COVID-19 guidance material available on the HSE website includes: Occupational Health Interim Guidance for Coronavirus; Pregnant Healthcare Workers and Healthcare Workers at Increased Risk; and Derogation for the Return to Work of Healthcare Workers; and other Occupational Health Services for staff are outlined on the HSE website <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/occupational-health/>. This includes referral processes and rehabilitation information. The HSE has a process of workplace rehabilitation that supports injured or sick employees to remain at, or return to, the workplace.

Health and Safety advice and information is provided to healthcare workers on matters such as social distancing at work, travelling for work, returning to work, and working from home. Among the many aspects of these services, the Healthcare Worker Covid-19 Helpline provided advice and support to healthcare workers from across the wider health family.

Recognising that recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for increased supports, and the flexibility to provide such supports across various platforms a Steering Group has been established to implement the HSE's Healthy Workplace Framework, based on the WHO Healthy Workplace Model. The objective is to provide integrated support through resources and guidance, to managers and staff, with a focus on the entire employee experience. Implementation and integration of the Framework, nationally, will provide for further development and strengthening of the necessary physical, psychological and personal supports for employees. All of these supports will be evidence based; in-line with current research, national and international standards; and compliant with all relevant occupational health and safety legislation where applicable.

The Framework will enable workplaces to adopt a proactive approach to supporting healthcare workers both through the acute and recovery phases of Covid-19. In addition, the inclusion of the State Claims Agency endorsed HSE Work Positive^{Cl} Tool (WPCI), a psychosocial risk management tool, which has reporting

capabilities and includes supplementary features such as signposting to internal and external supports, and the automatic generation of action reports; including advice and guidance on potential control measures (e.g. management of work load, up-skilling, role clarity, re-organisation of systems of work) programmed into the action plans to enhance the support to managers.

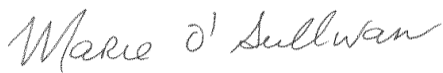
Organisational Health supports for HSE managers are available including guidance on building good manager/employee relationships, good practice guidance for healthcare staff in managing fatigue and sleep, stress management, and self-care.

In addition to the above, the National Psychosocial Response framework for Covid-19 is providing 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 measures like brief 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 CHO area offers a number of key supports including a Psychological First Aid Call Back Service- for health care 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 brief 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.

Yours sincerely.



Marie O'Sullivan
National HR