



8th October 2021

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 41712/21 - To ask the Minister for Health the extent to which families of patients and staff have had access to social workers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic with a view to the identification of possible challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

-Bernard J. Durkan

Dear Deputy Durkan,

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

Disability Services Response

Although some Disability Services were stepped down in March 2020 in line with government recommendations to minimise spread of COVID-19, throughout the pandemic, services continued to be provided on the phone/online and also, face to face for some children and families with high prioritised needs, taking all of the required infection prevention and control (IPC) precautions and in line with HSE's Alternative Models of Support (Non-Residential) (March 31st).

Throughout the pandemic, the HSE provided Guidance and Resources for Disability Services for COVID-19 to services, service users, carers, families, healthcare staff and service provider organisations. These continue to be available under the tab HSE Approved Guidance for Disability Services at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources>

The HSE and disability service providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for children and adults and are very much aware of the importance of service provision for the families of people with disabilities. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to continue the provision of services and supports based on prioritised needs of service users and their families in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies.

Older Persons Response

The Health Service Executive recognises and highly values the role of Social Work in the provision of holistic, client centred service delivery.

With regards to HSE Community Nursing Units, HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams are in place all over the country, to take reports of Elder Abuse and provide help. These teams were active throughout the pandemic, further details can be found at the below link;

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/elderabuse/protect-yourself/safeguarprotectteams.html>

General access to Social Work services varies from unit to unit, however it should also be noted that throughout the pandemic, the HSE has strived to deliver additional psychosocial supports to families and staff to support them during the last 18 months.

Mental Health Response

Mental Health Social Work services have and continue to operate during the pandemic using a combination of Face to Face and On- Line technology as best suited the needs of the Patient. In addition to this the HSE have developed a Psychosocial Response to COVID-19 which provides a layered care approach to addressing the psychosocial consequences of COVID-19, from a societal level and through the levels of need of the population across the life span. These responses are being delivered in community and acute services to support service users and staff that have been affected by COVID -19, and include innovative online, text and phone therapeutic supports. Many of these have been in development for some time, as part of a range of digital mental health initiatives underway in the HSE, and others have been developed specifically in response to Covid-19. Further detail of the psychosocial supports the HSE has on offer to the public can be found below;

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health-supports-and-services-during-coronavirus/mental-health-supports-and-services-during-coronavirus.html>

Both the HSE and NGO partners have been working, since the start of the pandemic, to provide mental and social wellbeing supports and services to our staff, service users and to the many different communities in our society. Nationally, the HSE have provided supports for frontline staff and with NGO support, have created free access to online counselling supports to assist those with mental health concerns gain immediate access to services.

With regards to supporting staff, the HSE have developed a number of different offerings to support staff, particularly during the recent challenging experiences. Further detail can be found at the below link;

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/coronavirus/health-and-wellbeing/minding-your-mental-health.html>

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



Yvonne O'Neill,
National Director,
Community Operations