



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte

Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'

Baile Átha Cliath 8

Office of the National Director of Human Resources

Health Service Executive

Dr. Steevens' Hospital

Dublin 8

Tel: 01 6352319 Email: nationalhr@hse.ie

Neasa Hourigan T.D.

28th September, 2021

PQ43376/21 To ask the Minister for Health his plans to ensure healthcare workers themselves have access to appropriately resourced occupational health services including mental health supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Neasa Hourigan

Dear Deputy,

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

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.

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 an additional 50 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. The helpline provided occupational support to 33,173 healthcare worker calls in the period March 2020 and July 2021.

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, including Attend Anywhere. 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.

In December 2020 EAP launched a National EAP Awareness campaign which successfully increased usage rates, helped to normalise the seeking of psychological support, and improved staff understanding of all the EAP services including counselling.

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.

It is anticipated that, when fully implemented and operational, WPCI will contribute to reducing the number and impact of incidents and will provide potentially provide significant savings for the HSE.

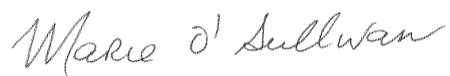
An additional €10m has been included in the estimates for 2022 to fill a number of key lead positions including senior counsellors within EAP; begin to address the critical significant shortage in Occupational Health Physicians and Occupational Health Nurses including the development of RCSI Diploma for Occupational Health Nursing, and the appointment of an Occupational Health Director of Nursing who will have responsibility for the development of and rollout of a Strategy for Occupational Health Nursing. It will also support the specialist service provided by EAP through on-going training for counsellors and advance skills training in trauma, dealing with long-Covid and post-Covid recovery; and additional priority accommodation requirements for both Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme. With respect to recruitment and retention the Unit will be working the Department of Health to progress Consultant status for Occupational Health Physicians.

The on-going implementation of HSE's Healthy Workplace Framework and further strengthening of our working relationship with the WHO will underpin, and continue to inform, the evidence-based services provided by the Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit and through the Framework.

Acknowledging the 18,000 public healthcare workers who were infected with Covid over the period of the pandemic; the on-going infection rate among healthcare workers; and the adverse implications this may have both in the short and longer-term a HSE Staff Rehabilitation Strategy will be further strengthened to provide services in support of HSE staff in their return to work during a period of rehabilitation, including a phased return and reasonable accommodation, as recommended by Occupational Health services. In addition, the Strategy will provide for ring-fenced funding to deliver a pathway for access to redeployment, within and outside of a substantive service (temporary and permanent), and include access to learning and development for a new role as necessary.

Work is on-going to identify new modern and fit for purpose premises in a number of regions to support the integrated delivery of staff support services by Occupational Health, EAP, and National Health and Safety function.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marie O'Sullivan".

Marie O'Sullivan
National HR