



Oifig an Stiúirthóra Oibríochtaí
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta
Bloc 4, Lárionad Gnó,
Tulach Mhór,
Co. Uíbh Fhailí, R35 FH59

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Deputy Sean Sherlock,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2

20 December 2022

PQ 60906/22

To ask the Minister for Health if he is aware of concerns raised by ambulance drivers in respect of their own health and safety due to challenging rostering of shifts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Sean Sherlock

Dear Deputy Sherlock,

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Every day, the National Ambulance Service deploys approximately 160-180 emergency ambulances, an average of 22 rapid response vehicles and in excess of 50 officer response vehicles operating from over 100 locations around the country. The NAS currently employs approximately 2,000 staff of which about 1,900 work as Advanced Paramedics, Paramedic Supervisors, Paramedics, Community Paramedics, Emergency Call Takers, Emergency Dispatchers, Aeromedical Dispatchers, Critical Care Nurses, Clinical Hub Nurses, Doctors and Intermediate Care Operatives.

The ambulance service operates on a national basis and mobilises responses to calls for assistance based on patient needs, ambulances may travel to and be dispatched from various locations irrespective of their base as they are not confined to work in geographical areas. This means that an ambulance based in Killarney may be dispatched to a call in Cork if it has just handed over a patient in Cork University Hospital and it is the nearest available ambulance to the incident. The current deployment model is designed around international best practice and has eliminated previous practices where the nearest ambulance was not always dispatched due to former legacy boundaries.

The NAS promotes health and wellbeing among its staff through liaison with the HSE's Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit which provides support for all staff and assists in preventing staff becoming ill or injured at work.

Workplace Health & Wellbeing is tasked with ensuring the delivery of high quality staff support services including Staff Health and Wellbeing, Occupational Health, Staff Engagement and Employee Assistance programmes.

NAS engages with its workforce through forums and staff feedback and implements initiatives based on these findings.

WellNAS is the portal for Workplace Wellbeing for all NAS Staff. The purpose, function and commitment of WellNAS is to build on our resources and tools for all NAS staff to enhance our knowledge and practice of self-care, minding our wellbeing, along with enhancing our





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awareness and utilisation of the supports available to us within the NAS and the HSE in this portal. In line with HSE Policy for the Prevention and Management of Stress in the workplace 2018 - WellNAS also supports staff in line with the following legislation:

- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act
- The Organisation of Working Time Act
- The Employment Equality Act
- Equality Status Act

Furthermore the portal gives information and access to various HSE policies, supports and programmes that staff can link into.

A 2015 Baseline Capacity Review of the National Ambulance Service (NAS) found that a significant number of additional staff would be required over the coming years. Since 2015 the NAS has increased its staff numbers each year. However, each year the level of demand for NAS services is also growing.

Recruitment to the NAS is being outpaced by demand for our services which has grown by almost 30%. There is no ready supply of Paramedics in Ireland and NAS for the most part must educate their own workforce in their own college. The Paramedic programme is degree level and takes three years.

To support retention of existing staff and attraction of new recruits, NAS and our trade union partners have agreed to undertake a partnership review of rostering and scheduling arrangements across the country. In this regard, NAS have already taken the decision to assign new recruits to a work location within 45km of their home address.

Additional staffing to be allocated to any Ambulance Station in Ireland will be dependent on the prioritisation of service requirements identified in the forthcoming Demand and Capacity Analysis, the ability to recruit and educate Student Paramedics living within 45 km of any Ambulance Station, approval of new development funding in Estimates 2023 and the duration of Paramedic education.

In July 2021, NAS commissioned a new Demand and Capacity Analysis to inform future workforce planning over the next 5 years. The outcome of that detailed analysis is expected and will inform a workforce plan over the next 24 months. NAS recently held a Student Paramedic campaign to fill existing vacancies and currently funded new service developments. There has been no reduction in the staffing levels in the ambulance service and where vacancies arise or exist, NAS continues to educate student paramedics to address normal workforce attrition.

I trust that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

William Merriman
Director of Operations
National Ambulance Service

