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17 June 2022

Deputy David Cullinane  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 29856/22: To ask the Minister for Health the desirable staffing ratios in public dental practice between dentists, dental nurses, hygienists, technicians and administrative supports.**

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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.

The HSE provides dental services for children aged up to and including 15 years, and adults and children with special care needs. The nature of dental treatment requires two dental team members, either a dentist and dental nurse or a dental hygienist and dental nurse for each procedure. Clinical teams work to ensure that treatment is provided in a safe and effective way, with the necessary safeguards in place for children and vulnerable adults.

HSE dental services do not directly employ Clinical Dental Technicians.

There are a number of factors that affect calculation of the “desirable staffing ratios in public dental practice”. The most significant factor should be the burden of dental disease in the population, and the distribution of disease across the population. Populations with a low incidence of dental disease would require less curative treatments than a population with high levels of untreated disease. The skill-mix of dentists, dental hygienists, clinical dental technicians and dental nurses required should reflect the needs of the population.

These include the type of service to be delivered which is determined by national policy, and would also influence the skill mix required to meet the needs of the population. The skill mix required for a treatment service based on self-referral by patients would differ from that for a public health based preventive approach to oral health that would target resources at those with identified needs. With regard to ratios of clinicians (dentists, dental hygienists) to dental nurses and administrative support staff in a specific clinic, these will vary according to the number of surgeries, decontamination facilities and the type of service being provided in a particular location. In general, workforce planning would aim to have a slightly larger number of dental nurses, previously some dental services used a target ratio of 1 WTE Dentist to 1.25 WTE Dental Nurses.

Other factors that are relevant are the number, location and suitability of clinics within the geographical area to be served, as well as hospital based services for patients whose needs cannot be met in community settings. For example, very large clinics with multiple surgeries require full time staffing of the Local Decontamination Unit.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Green', is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

**Joseph Green**  
**AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations**