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Deputy David Cullinane
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 12723/22: To ask the Minister for Health the status of school dental screening by service area; the extent to which services are behind schedule; the number of service areas which are operating a limited service for example special care patients only; the number of staffing vacancies per service area; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

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.

Appendix 1 details KPI data for the HSE Dental Service for the total number of new oral health patients in target groups (1st, 4th and 6th class primary school children) attending for scheduled assessment for each of the years 2019 to 2021 by Dental Service Area.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the initial restriction reduced service provision to emergency care only, having a sizeable impact on patient care delivery.

While the greatest impact was between March and end June 2020, all dental care ranges were significantly limited by the impact of Covid-19. The Cyber Attack on the HSE system in Summer 2021 also had a significant negative impact on Dental Services.

These children are seen at this age range to identify opportunities for preventive interventions, need for restorative care, as well as reviewing the development of the dentition including orthodontic anomalies and referral for HSE orthodontic assessment.

The reported metric is the number of new oral health patients in target groups attending for scheduled assessment. In 2019 a total of 151,393 new oral health patients in target groups attended for scheduled assessment and this figure is the basis for attendance in 2020 and 2021. The table below shows the number of attendances in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and the number not attending in 2020 and 2021. These calculations are based on predicted uptake of services for children in targeted groups and are based on 2018 and 2019 data.

Number of new oral health patients in target age groups attending for scheduled assessment

Year	Number of expected appointments	Number of appointments	Number who did not receive an appointment	% who received an appointment
2019	151,392	151,392	N/A	N/A
2020	151,392	55,324	96,068	36.5%
2021	151,392	82,494	68,898	54.5%

It should be noted that the shortfall in attendance in 2021 compared to 2019 was much more evident in the first half of 2021 where attendances were 46,497 less than the first half of 2019 whereas in the second half of 2021 attendances were 22,401 less than the second half of 2019.

While most Oral Health staff have now returned to core duties enabling the safe resumption of services, strict adherence to physical distancing and enhanced infection prevention and control measures has reduced the capacity of the service and it is necessary to optimise the resources available.

Vacancies per CHO

CHO 1

No information on vacancies supplied.

CHO 2

No information on vacancies supplied.

CHO 3

In CHO3, the Wholetime Equivalent (WTE) value for Dental Surgeons (which reflects each grade i.e. Principal Dental Surgeon, Senior Administrative Dental Surgeons, Special Needs Dental Surgeons and General Dental Surgeons) is currently 23.7 WTE's. One WTE which had been vacant is in the process of being filled.

CHO 4

The service is currently recruiting both dentists and dental nurses from existing NRS panels. The following is the number of vacancies currently in Cork/Kerry.

Grade	Cork	Kerry
Senior Admin Dental Surgeon	1 - start date 09/22	1 (Filled on interim basis now)
Senior Dental Surgeon	0	0
General Dental Surgeon	3 posts being processed by NRS.	0

	<p>Start date of 04/2022 for 2 posts.</p> <p>Paperwork being processed for 2 posts which will be submitted to NRS for recruitment.</p>	
Dental Nurse	2 dental nurse posts to be filled later this month.	0
Senior Dental Nurse	0	0

CHO 5

With respect to vacancies, there are a number of posts that need to be filled.

Current vacancies in South Tipperary:

- 2 General Dental Surgeons
- 2 Dental Nurses.

Current vacancies in Carlow & Kilkenny:

- Senior Special Needs Dental Surgeon (this was created by suppressing a full General Dental Surgeon post & a day from another General Dental Surgeon)
- Senior Administrative Dental Surgeon (due to be filled shortly)
-

The Senior Special Needs Dental Surgeon post, although advertised widely, has yet to be filled. There have been a number of posts lost during previous embargoes on recruitment and incentivised career breaks that have not been replaced, including a Senior Paediatric Dental Surgeon.

Vacancies in Wexford/Waterford:

A number of General Dental Surgeon and Dental Nurse posts are awaiting approval and/or filling. However, the real issue is that the equivalent of five Dentist and Dental Nurse teams have been lost from the service in previous moratoria on recruitment. These includes the loss of the Senior Clinical (Paediatric) Dental Surgeon post in Waterford, the Senior Administrative Dental Surgeon post in Wexford, three General Dental Surgeon posts and the loss of five corresponding dental nursing posts. The loss of these posts has severely limited the capacity of the service to deliver care in a timely manner. In addition, the service has been adversely affected by a number of long term sick leaves involving experienced clinicians.

CHO 6

1.0 WTE x GDS temp

1.0 WTE x Dental Nurse Permanent

CHO 7

Permanent vacancies:

WTE permanent vacancy unfilled	WTE
General Dental Surgeons	10.8
General Dental Nurses	4.3
Dental Hygienists	1

Temporary vacancies unfilled:

WTE temporary vacancies unfilled	WTE
General Dental Surgeons	2.5
General Dental Nurses	2.2
Dental Hygienists	1

CHO 8

In relation to recruitment, there would appear to be a national shortage of both Dental Surgeons and Dental hygienists owing to the significant challenges faced in attempting to fill vacant posts, either through recruitment campaigns or using numerous recruitment agencies.

There are currently three full time General Dental Surgeon vacancies in Louth/Meath which will be proceeding to a recruitment campaign in the coming weeks.

There are two full time dental nurse vacancies in the Midlands, with recruitment at the moment.

The following measures are continually being reviewed to improve the dental service in general for the eligible population and to address the treatment waiting lists outlined above;

- a) Increase in contracted hours of existing staff including overtime
- b) Approval of an increase in the WTE of existing HSE staff who wish to increase their contractual hours
- c) Recruiting additional dental teams: dental surgeons, dental nurses and dental hygienists
- d) Recruiting agency staff
- e) Deploying staff in centres with the most urgent clinical need and reviewing waiting lists monthly to reassess this approach.

CHO 9

CHO 9 has 3.2 Whole Time Equivalent vacancies for general dental surgeons. Approval to back fill these posts has been given and Dublin North City County are actively engaged in the recruitment process.

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 horizontal line.

Joseph Green
AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations



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Appendix 1: HSE Dental Service KPI Data 2019 - 2021

Table 1: a) No. of new Oral Health patients in target groups (1st/2nd, 4th and 6th class) attending for scheduled assessment

CHO	LHO	Q4 2019	Q4 2020	Q4 2021
National Total		151,392	55,324	82,494.0
CHO 1	Total	19,266	9,129	13,800.0
CHO 1	Cavan Monaghan	5,116	3,571	3,135.0
CHO 1	Donegal	8,321	2,659	5,286.0
CHO 1	Sligo Leitrim	5,829	2,899	5,379.0
CHO 2	Total	12,145	2,904	6,156.0
CHO 2	Galway	4,317	531	1,486.0
CHO 2	Mayo	3,690	1,264	2,057.0
CHO 2	Roscommon	4,138	1,109	2,613.0
CHO 3	Total	11,632	3,385	4,153.0
CHO 3	Clare	4,148	1,481	1,307.0

CHO 3	Limerick	2,544	963	1,283.0
CHO 3	North Tipperary East Limerick	4,940	941	1,563.0
CHO 4	Total	20,641	8,086	8,487.0
CHO 4	Kerry	3,419	1,277	1,188.0
CHO 4	North Cork	4,105	1,710	1,494.0
CHO 4	North Lee	5,175	2,027	2,791.0
CHO 4	South Lee	6,369	2,415	2,233.0
CHO 4	West Cork	1,573	657	781.0
CHO 5	Total	18,638	6,621	11,973.0
CHO 5	Carlow Kilkenny	4,992	1,690	3,418.0
CHO 5	South Tipperary	6,239	2,485	3,737.0
CHO 5	Waterford	3,919	1,608	2,972.0
CHO 5	Wexford	3,488	838	1,846.0
CHO 6	Total	8,143	4,054	6,743.0
CHO 6	Dun Laoghaire/ Dublin South East/Wicklow	8,143	4,054	6,743.0
CHO 7	Total	25,180	9,534	12,059.0

CHO 7	Dublin South City	3,175	1,627	2,363.0
CHO 7	Dublin South West	5,242	2,136	2,860.0
CHO 7	Dublin West	5,420	2,014	3,561.0
CHO 7	Kildare West Wicklow	11,343	3,757	3,275.0
CHO 8	Total	17,842	3,829	6,124.0
CHO 8	Laois Offaly	3,154	720	2,188.0
CHO 8	Longford Westmeath	4,317	875	2,633.0
CHO 8	Louth	5,547	1,100	709.0
CHO 8	Meath	4,824	1,134	594.0
CHO 9	Total	17,905	7,782	12,999.0
CHO 9	Dublin North	7,419	2,456	2,828.0
CHO 9	Dublin North Central	2,676	2,003	2,561.0
CHO 9	Dublin North West	7,810	3,323	7,610.0