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Date: 09/03/2022

Deputy Gary Gannon TD

Dáil Éireann

Leinster House

Dublin 2

PQ No. 12901/22

To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the campaign by an association (Neurological Association of Ireland) which is seeking an additional 100 neurology nurse specialists across Ireland; if he has engaged with this association; if so, the details of the engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ No. 12904/22

To ask the Minister for Health his views on whether investing in neurology nurses is a cost-efficient way of improving the efficiency of outpatient clinics, reducing waiting times and ensuring patients have access to the specialist support they need to manage their conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Gannon,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Response:

In 2020, the National Clinical Programme for Neurology (NCPN) in collaboration with the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) completed a survey of Neurological services in the Republic of Ireland. The figures referred to in this PQ and figures released by the NAI, are based on the survey from 2020. The survey highlighted that although all Neurological centers

have access to a designated clinical nurse specialist and/or advanced nurse practitioner, the total number of Neurology nurse specialists are significantly below what is recommended by International Guidelines recommendations and recommendations within the NCPN's Model of Care (2016). It was particularly evident that there is an inequity geographically in terms of the distribution of Neurology nurse specialists, with the West and Southwest of the country having a lower ratio of nurses per capita.

Nurse specialists play a significant role in the triaging, assessment, treatment and for ongoing support of the neurological patient. NCPN recognizes that skilled and highly trained nursing staff add value to neurological services and NCPN endorses the expansion of the nursing workforce dedicated to Neurology. NCPN's work streams in recent times have focused on reconfiguring the management of diseases such as Headache, Epilepsy and Motor Neuron Disease, enabling clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practitioners to lead and coordinate care in the community, thereby building capacity within acute neurological services. This work has been recognized by the Sláintecare programme in 2020 with submissions relating to Headache and Epilepsy receiving support and funding to run pilots which have increased the nursing and MDT workforce for these conditions. This funding is now being mainstreamed, benefitting 4 neurological hospital sites and patients served.

Additionally, NCPN has submitted new service development estimates in 2021 for an additional 16 clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practitioners in 2022, across different specialties and hospital groups. NCPN awaits the outcome of these submissions. If successful, these additional posts will initially address the areas of greatest geographical inequity and the subspecialties most in need. Plans to incrementally increase overall numbers of nurse specialists are being developed in order to address the remaining deficit. It is anticipated that through new service development estimates in 2023, NCPN will make further submissions in order to further bridge the gap currently experienced in the neurology nursing workforce.

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Benton

General Manager

Acute Operations