



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.
Dail Eireann,
Dublin 2.

11th April 2022

PQ Number: 17283/22

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the extent to which health services for persons suffering from eating disorders is developing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Bernard J. Durkan

Dear Deputy Durkan,

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.

Eating disorders have the highest mortality and morbidity within mental health and they pose significant health, social and economic cost to people with eating disorders, to their families and to society. Early intervention, evidence based care, and consistent support make a profound difference to the clinical and personal recovery of people who are affected by eating disorders, including to those in adolescence when so many eating disorders begin.

In January 2018 the HSE published a National Model of Care for Eating Disorders (MOC) in partnership with College of Psychiatrists' of Ireland and Bodywhys. In the absence of a pre-existing dedicated eating disorder infrastructure or strategy, this Model of Care document has been developed in order to guide the provision of high quality, accessible and value for money eating disorder services in Ireland. Key recommendations include the development of a national network of dedicated eating disorder teams embedded within the mental health service, a stepped model of outpatient, day patient and inpatient care provision based on clinical need, and the development of a skilled, trained workforce. In the context of the significant physical morbidity associated with eating disorders, this Model of Care also recommends a strong integration between primary care, mental health services and medical teams, including the bridging of the acute hospital and mental health service divide through mutual clinical commitments and shared pathways.

Most people can and do recover from eating disorders if they receive effective, evidence based treatment from ED trained staff. While a small number of people benefit from more intensive treatment through day programmes or inpatient care, the most effective treatment setting is in the community. The MOC has a core focus on developing regional community based specialist eating disorder services provided by skilled multidisciplinary teams.



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The NCPED aims to establish an ED network (8 adult teams and 8 CAMHS teams) in accordance with the agreed Model of Care 2018. There are currently 3 eating disorders (ED) specialist teams in operation, 2 CAMHS teams serving Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CHO4) and Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare and West Wicklow (CHO7) and an adult team in Community Healthcare East (CHO6). These multidisciplinary teams provide specialist eating disorder assessment and treatment in the community and are the foundations of delivering quality eating disorder care across the stepped model of care. CAMHS ED team staffing is recommended at WTE 14.4 per 500,000-600,000. Adult ED Team staffing is recommended at WTE 13.4 per 500,000-600,000.

Since 2016 €7.9 million has been made available for Eating Disorder posts through programme for government funding. Of that, €3.3 million has been invested to date in Eating Disorder Specialist Posts. This has resulted in the set-up of the 3 existing Eating Disorder teams and to progress recruitment for the 2nd phase of teams in CHO4 (adult), CHO9 (adult) and CHO2 (CAMHS). This 2nd phase of teams are in advanced stages of recruitment and set up to establish a high quality service. The balance of €4.8 million remains available for continued investment in specialist Eating Disorder posts including a 3rd phase of specialist community team development in 2022 for CHO5 Adult, CHO1 adult and CHO9 CAMHS.

The NCPED recommends delivering 3 eating disorder teams per year to ensure sustainable phased recruitment and training. The HSE is provided funding on a yearly basis as per the estimates process. However, the availability of skilled staff is a significant issue in mental health services where demand outstrips supply in both the national and international contexts. The HSE is working closely with NDTP, National Doctors Training and Planning, to take measures to ensure trained clinicians in Eating Disorders are available to take up posts.

For all CHOs where funding has been allocated, The NCPED is continuing to work closely to support recruitment, set up clinical pathways and provide education and training to clinicians. All sites are committed to filling the posts and creating these community eating disorder teams. It is anticipated that by the end of 2022, the Eating Disorder Network of community teams will have significantly expanded.

Adult community eating disorder teams will begin by providing outpatient care then progress to developing Intensive treatment programmes (day patient care) and ultimately provide specialist inpatient care. Although there is good evidence that inpatient psychiatric care is not required for most people with eating disorders, it is recognised that a small number of people, mainly with restrictive eating disorders will require access to inpatient care for structured refeeding and/or stabilisation. Inpatient psychiatric admission will be indicated when treatment in outpatient and day patient levels of care has been unsuccessful. It will be indicated for those who most need it and with a greater severity of illness (those at severely low weight, comorbidity that requires inpatient psychiatric treatment and those who require 24 hours structured refeeding and stabilisation). For safe integrated care the MOC recommends that adult inpatient psychiatric beds are co-located within acute hospitals. The inpatient psychiatric beds will be developed to provide nutritional rehabilitation through nasogastric feeding.



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The Adult Eating Disorder team in CHO 6 is currently based at St Vincents University Hospital. The community base will be within the Mount Carmel Community Hospital campus and will deliver outpatient and day patient services. The 3 specialist inpatient beds currently operational and linked with the adult eating disorder team (for the catchment area of CHO 6) will remain within St Vincents University Hospital acute psychiatric unit.

Adults who have an eating disorder diagnosis and require inpatient care can be referred to any of the HSE's acute inpatient mental health-approved centres around the country. Adults presenting with an eating disorder can also be treated in an acute hospital if their physical health needs require this. Under National Mental Health Policy Documents and in line with MOC the number of adult eating beds will increase, including an additional 3 beds in St. Vincents' University Hospital, 5 beds in North Dublin, 5 beds in Galway and 5 beds in Cork. Timeframes for new beds will have to be identified. These beds will be linked to eating disorder hubs and provision will be in line with Sharing the Vision recommendations.

Children and adolescents with an eating disorder diagnosis who require inpatient treatment can be referred to one of the CAMHS inpatient approved centres. Referrals are reviewed individually to determine the likely clinical benefits of admission as well as possible other treatment alternatives. There are 4 CAMHS Units across the HSE; Linn Dara Approved Centre, Dublin, St Josephs Approved Centre in Dublin, Eist Linn Approved Centre in Cork and Merlin Park Approved Centre in Galway. Specialist eating disorder beds are available in Merlin Park Galway and Linn Dara AC. There are plans for an Eating Disorder Unit in the new National Children's Hospital which will provide 8 additional beds.

Anyone who is concerned about an eating disorder should discuss it with their GP. They can offer medical assessment, support and information on treatment options including referral to community mental health team. Guidelines for the assessment and management of eating disorders in primary care have been developed in collaboration with the Irish College of General Practise (ICGP).

Adults with eating disorders can access treatment from local community mental health teams. There are currently 112 adult community mental health teams nationwide. Children and adolescents with eating disorders can access treatment through CAMHS community teams. Every effort is made to prioritise referrals for people with eating disorders.

An estimated 188,895 Irish people will experience an eating disorder at some point in their lives (based on epidemiological projections). Approx. 1,757 new ED cases develop each year in Ireland in the 10-49 age group. Females are at least 2-3 times more likely than males to develop an eating disorder. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic there has been a significant rise in presentations of eating disorders across health care settings in Ireland. This is a similar pattern being reported internationally. Children, adolescents and adults are presenting more medically unwell with more severe clinical presentations than prior to the



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pandemic. Referral rates to existing community eating disorder teams have significantly surpassed predicted demand and capacity estimates made prior to the pandemic.

The NCPED recently successfully secured funding to recruit medical and paediatric consultants within acute hospitals to work with existing and future community eating disorder teams. As part of Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2022 (EDAW 2022), the NCPED in collaboration with National Clinical Programmes for acute medicine, emergency medicine and paediatrics hosted a webinar "Recognising and Managing Medical Emergencies in Eating Disorders. 600 clinicians registered for this webinar.

Each of the 3 eating disorder teams collects clinical and activity data, this data is collated and each year a summary of the data is published on our webpage. A comprehensive database system is not yet available and the data is gathered and verified manually. The 2020 data from the 3 teams showed a 60% rise in referrals, 43% increase in assessments completed and twice as many people started treatment when compared to 2019. Our 2021 data was published on the NCPED website on Monday February 28th to coincide with the first day of Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2022. The data shows that in 2021 there was a further 120% increase in referrals received by the 3 teams and twice as many accessed an assessment. There was a 71% increase in those accessing treatment. The significant rise in eating disorders was seen mostly in girls and women who represented 94% of those assessed to have an eating disorder. Diagnoses of Anorexia Nervosa rose by 172%. Recovery rates were maintained by the 3 teams.

Since the onset of the pandemic Telehealth has been rapidly adopted and has enabled continued access to specialist eating disorder teams. These teams continued to provide ongoing care throughout the pandemic. With Over 500 therapy sessions have been delivered to date. The telehealth solution has allowed greater access to specialist care and is expected to be used beyond the pandemic.

Bodywhys, The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland are partners of the NCPED. The MOC for eating disorders recognises as crucial, a committed collaborative partnership between Bodywhys, the HSE and the mental health services, in developing structures to support recovery, at all levels of the stepped care model. The HSE provides funding annually to Bodywhys which provides a range of services (support groups, online groups, email and family programmes) for adults and young people with eating disorders, and their families. Bodywhys has extensively increased its support services since the onset of the pandemic and information on all their services are available on their website.

In March 2019 the HSE launched the first Self Care App for Eating Disorders which provides valuable information for those with or people caring for someone with an eating disorder. The HSE self-care app is public facing and has been downloaded 10,858 times with over 170,000 page views. It was developed in collaboration with BodyWhys.



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The development of a skilled experienced workforce in eating disorders is a key recommendation of the MOC. The NCPED has worked to develop online and face to face training and education for all clinicians including supervision in evidence based treatments. This will be paramount as newly recruited teams become operational and delivering services. As the eating disorder network continues to grow we will continue to convene biannual Eating Disorder Team network days to support training and shared learning.

The National Clinical programme for Eating Disorders promotes awareness around these significant mental health disorders from which full recovery is possible with early, effective, evidence based treatment delivered by skilled experienced multidisciplinary teams. The NCPED also looks forward to the continued expansion of eating disorder services in Ireland until every one of all ages experiencing an eating disorder has equal access to assessment and treatment.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Amir Niazi
National Clinical Advisor & Group Lead for Mental Health
Clinical Design and Innovation
Health Service Executive