



Oifig Ceannasaí Oibríochtaí,
Oibríochtaí Pobail, Cúram Priomhúil

Seomra 243, Ospidéal Dr Steevens,
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24th May 2022

Deputy Réada Cronin,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 23742/22 - To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons who are currently notified as having long-Covid; if there is a national registry point for same; if so, the person or body that is in charge of the registry; the current arrangements for general practitioners to notify to public-health system patients with the condition; the data capture strategy that is allowing the adequate provision of services in quantum and location; the number of medical personnel who have been seconded or hired to deal, specifically with long-Covid; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Reada Cronin

Dear Deputy Cronin,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions (PQ 23742/22), which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

COVID-19 is a new disease so information on the disease, its features, incidence and disease course are still emerging. The natural history, clinical course and consequences of COVID-19 are still not completely understood. It is recognised that most people with Covid-19 return to baseline after acute infection, however a proportion will experience persistent and prolonged symptoms. There are many terms used to describe this post-acute sequelae, the most commonly used terms are Post COVID-19 Condition or Long COVID. Common symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath and cognitive dysfunction which can have a significant impact on everyday functioning. Symptoms may be of new onset, following initial recovery from an acute COVID-19 episode, or may persist from the initial illness. The condition usually presents with clusters of symptoms, often overlapping, which may change over time and can affect any system in the body.

The HSE recognises the need to provide follow-up support and care for patients experiencing prolonged signs and symptoms of COVID-19. In response to this, it has developed an Interim Model of Care for Long COVID which was finalised in September 2021. The aim of the MoC is to provide a national approach to provision of services and supports for patients experiencing prolonged symptoms of Covid-19. It sets out a framework for the provision of these services and supports spanning General Practice, Community Services, Acute Hospitals and Mental Health Services. The resultant Interim Model of Care recommended the development of eight Post-Acute Clinics and six Long COVID clinics.

The establishment of Post-acute and Long COVID clinics within each hospital is the initial priority for implementation of this Model. The Model of Care identifies the key personnel including consultants in the area of infectious disease, respiratory medicine and neurology and additional multidisciplinary staff required to support the work of these clinics. In total, over 70 new posts will be funded as part of the Model of Care



across the eight Post-acute and six Long COVID sites. Recruitment of these key personnel has now commenced at each hospital site.

In some incidences the designated hospital sites are providing both Long COVID and Post-Acute clinics on an interim basis while awaiting recruitment of full staffing as per the Model of Care. They have been established in response to local need and are leveraging existing resources and capacity. The HSE is now working with these sites to expand their resources to ensure they can meet the requirements of the Model of Care and what is required within a local context. It is also working with sites that do not already have access to designated clinics so that these can become operational.

At present the exact number of patients that are affected with Long COVID remains unknown, but published reports indicated that approximately 10-20% of COVID-19 patients experience lingering symptoms for weeks to months following COVID-19 infection. As part of its programme of work, the HSE is examining how it can model the possible numbers affected by Long COVID. An epidemiological survey is being planned in this regard and will be key to providing insight and understanding to the prevalence of Long COVID in the Irish Population and risk factors for developing Long COVID. It will also help to forecast future demand for services and will inform the direction of the Model of Care.

To further assist in estimating population need for Post-Acute and Long COVID Clinics and resource requirements, the HSE will be endeavouring to capture demand and activity levels of each clinic. The HSE is currently developing a minimum data set to capture this information. This will include the waiting list for each clinic, the number of patients referred to each clinic on a monthly basis and the number of patients who attended each clinic on a monthly basis. Collation of this data will be key to informing current and future service provision and resource requirements.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJ Dunford', written over a horizontal line.

TJ Dunford
Head of Operations - Primary Care
Community Operations