



Oifig Ceannasaí Oibríochtaí,  
Oibríochtaí Pobail, Cúram Príomhúil

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24<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Deputy Neale Richmond,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 23914/22 – To ask the Minister for Health if he will introduce additional occupational therapy posts across the country to deal with the numbers of those suffering with long-COVID; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**- Neale Richmond**

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Dear Deputy Richmond,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions (PQ 23914/22), 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 its 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. 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 persist from the initial illness. Symptoms may also fluctuate or relapse over time.

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.

Post-Acute Clinics will be led by respiratory consultants and will provide assessment and ongoing care for patients within twelve weeks of infection. The following sites have been nominated as Post-Acute COVID clinics:

- Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown
- Mater University Hospital
- Tallaght University Hospital
- St. James University Hospital
- Cork University Hospital
- University Hospital Galway
- University Hospital Limerick



- Letterkenny University Hospital

Long COVID clinics will be led by infectious disease consultants and will provide assessment and ongoing care for patients with prolonged symptoms of COVID-19 for more than 12 weeks after initial onset of infection. The following sites have been nominated as Long COVID clinics:

- St. James University Hospital
- Cork University Hospital
- University Hospital Galway
- University Hospital Limerick
- Beaumont University Hospital
- St. Vincent's University Hospital

The establishment of Post-Acute and Long COVID clinics within each hospital is the initial priority for implementation of the Model of Care. Recruitment of the key personnel to support the work of these clinics has now commenced. This includes consultants in the areas of infectious disease, respiratory medicine, neurology, and additional multi-disciplinary staff, including occupational therapy.

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.

The HSE continues to monitor and review new and existing evidence in relation to Long COVID and the approach to assessing and managing Long COVID. Therefore, the approach to implementation is flexible as there may be a need to change and adapt these services based on learnings from the clinics, emerging evidence and current and anticipated future demand.

At present, patients with persistent symptoms following COVID-19 infection may be followed up by their GP or in hospital settings as clinically appropriate. People in the community who are concerned about persistent symptoms following COVID-19 should contact their GP in the first instance, who will be able to assess and signpost them towards the service most appropriate to their needs, including on-ward referral to a Post-Acute or Long COVID clinic if appropriate.

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