



Ceannasaí Seirbhíse, Seirbhísí Cúram
Príomhúil,
Chabháin, Dhún na nGall, Liatroim,
Mhúineacháin, Shiligh,
Campas Naomh Damhnait,
Muineachain

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13th June 2022,

Ms Niamh Smyth T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 26765/22 - "To ask the Minister for Health the steps that are being taken to fill vacancies in primary care in counties Cavan and Monaghan for children who are waiting for occupational therapy, speech and language support and psychology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy

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.

Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) services, Primary Care (PC):

There are 5 vacancies, with the capacity to hold between 585 & 675 active cases. The maximum Paediatric Primary Care (PC) waiting time is 144 wks. This is due to children who have transferred from the Children's Disability Team to Primary Care following implementation of Progressing Disabilities. The average Paediatric PC waiting time is 76 wks.

Children are not prioritised at the point of referral, waiting lists are managed by date of referral. Children are only then removed from the waiting list when there is capacity to offer them a service, hence the relatively small waiting list for intervention.

There are national recruitment difficulties in SLT. Currently 67% of all approved Paediatric SLT posts in Primary Care have been filled. Backfill is being approved but national staffing shortages are impacting on service delivery locally. In addition to National recruitment drives, there are international recruitment drives being taken to try and encourage overseas graduates and therapists to work in Ireland.

Current initiatives:

- SLT Manager providing 1 day clinic a week to backfill a gap that could not be covered from within existing staffing.
- Children from waiting lists are being offered a targeted language intervention based on referral information and follow up questionnaires by our Chatterbox team, prior to formal initial assessment.
- Support is being offered to children in preschools by our chatterbox team.
- Work is ongoing to consider and develop PC pathways for children with ASD – children with ASD have not been seen in PC since the setup of the CDT's so there is currently no-one with the appropriate skill set to adequately manage the needs of this population – training, both in house and external and appropriate supervision is required.
- Backfill is requested as vacancies arise. We are due to interview and create a CHO1 Senior panel in Jun/Jul 2022 as currently there is no national senior panel in place and this has contributed to the inability to backfill senior posts.



Occupational Therapy (OT) services, Primary Care (PC):

Every effort is being made by the OT Manager, with support from the General Manager and the Head of Service to ensure that all vacant positions or upcoming vacancies in Occupational Therapy have their required HR processes completed with priority to ensure there is minimal disruption to filling of these positions. However, there are difficulties filling staff grade positions, and this has been a concern at national level due to the high number of positions available across all sectors, and a lack of available staff grades or newly qualified staff to fill these positions. CHO1 completed an OT Senior Grade completion in Aug 2021, to ensure there is an active Paediatric Senior OT panel should any vacancies arise, to ensure there is no delay in the recruitment process.

Psychology Services, Primary Care:

In order to address waiting times for children waiting for Psychology services, the following temporary positions were sought and approved:

- Senior Psychologist 0.8 WTE, commenced duty on 2nd May 2022
- Staff Grade Psychologist 1 WTE – commenced duty on 21st February 2022

A specific wait list post remains vacant and the service is currently seeking to fill this position through agency.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Doyle
A/Head of Service Primary Care CHO1

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