



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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Office of the Head of Operations,
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24th November 2022

Deputy Willie O'Dea,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: willie.odea@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Dea,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 57175/22

To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide dedicated dietitians to work with autistic children given that it is common for autistic children to have issues with food or eating; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The HSE acknowledges the challenges in meeting the demand for disability services and is acutely conscious of how this impacts on children and their families.

Children and adults requiring services would access services through Primary Care Teams in CHO Areas. Children with more complex issues would access services through Children's Disability Services.

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)

In line with the PDS model, resources assigned to children's disability services are allocated to the CDNTs; 91 CDNTs are aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.

Children and their families will have access to a range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Work is ongoing on mapping specialised services and supports, and paediatric supports available as well as an analysis of the service gaps for children with highly complex needs. This will facilitate the HSE to develop standardised approaches to integrated pathways of support for CDNTs and Primary



Care staff.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work, dietetics and others. The team works closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities.

Disability services are provided based on need rather than diagnosis. Services are provided following individual assessment according to the child's individual requirements and support needs. Dieticians on the CDNTs work together with the multidisciplinary team to meet the individual child's requirements.

The 2021 National CDNT Census and Workforce Review identified that there were 21.1 whole time equivalent dietitian posts assigned to the CDNTs. In addition, a further 190 development posts and 136.3 posts to support special schools were assigned to CDNTs in 2022. Each Community Healthcare Organisation determined which disciplines were required to support the CDNTs in their area.

Recruitment and Retention

The attached HSE National CDNT Staff Census and Workforce Review Report undertaken in 2021 provides valuable information on the number of staff working in CDNTs by discipline and grade. The 2022 CDNT Staff Census and Workforce Review is being collated currently. It is intended that the information from this exercise will be available in December 2022 allowing for a 2021 / 2022 trend analysis.

The HSE and Lead Agencies are operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe.

In partnership with our CDNT Lead Agencies, we continue to explore a range of options to enhance the recruitment and retention of essential staff into our CDNTs. In addition, the HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with our partnering Lead Agencies to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market.

The lead agencies and the number of teams they lead are: HSE (41 teams), Enable Ireland (20 teams), Avista (formerly Daughters of Charity - 4 teams) Brothers of Charity (6 teams), Central Remedial Clinic (5 teams), St. Michael's House (4 teams), Cope Foundation (3 teams), St. Gabriel's (2 teams), St. Josephs Foundation (2 teams), Stewarts Care (2 teams), with CoAction West Cork and KARE leading 1 team each. Each lead agency is responsible for recruitment of staff on their CDNTs and is using a variety of approaches to fill funded vacancies. Each agency has on-going rolling recruitment to address a range of vacancies including short term temporary posts, full time permanent posts, development posts, part time posts etc. CDNTs and Lead Agencies report on the number of vacancies rather than the number of staff appointed.

Options to support the recruitment of staff for the CDNTs currently being explored include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades
- Apprentice Programme for therapy grades
- Employment of graduates as therapy assistants as they await CORU registration
- Expansion of therapy assistants in the system with HSE supporting individuals to return to education to qualify as therapists.

International Recruitment campaigns have been launched for qualified healthcare professionals. To support these international campaigns, the HSE is working in partnership with CORU, the regulator, and government departments to maximise this pool.

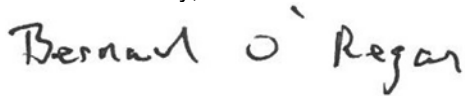


Some CHO Areas report that staff from outside the European Union have been successful at interview recently. However, the pre-clearance stage to appointment time frame can take a number of weeks and is heavily dependent on a number of factors including the candidate returning documentation in a timely manner, the requirement in some cases for overseas clearances or visas, return of references and notice period to be worked. Pre-clearances can take a minimum of 2 weeks (if all documentation is submitted as requested), however it can take significantly longer if provision of the aforementioned documentation is delayed. It should also be noted that some candidates may be available for an immediate start with other candidates having to provide notice to a current employer. This will impact the time to hire.

Some further points to note in relation to recruitment and retention of CDNT staff include the following:

- There are panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists.
- National Disability Operations is currently reviewing the area of Assistant Grades.
- A comprehensive Team Development Programme 2020/2021 has been provided for CDNMs and cascaded to all team members. This programme, which was designed to support the establishment of the new CDNTs and the implementation of the new model of service, will also support staff retention. All resources from this Programme are available online for CDNMs
- An extensive CDNT Training and Development Programme 2022/2023 has been launched. This is supported with dedicated funding and based on the current competency gaps identified and prioritised by the National CDNMs Forum. The HSE and Lead Agencies are committed to providing ongoing training and development supports for CDNT staff supporting their professional development and retention.
- A secure site for CDNMs and their staff has been set up on Basecamp to facilitate sharing of training and development resources as well as clinical and service resources.

Yours Sincerely,



**Mr Bernard O'Regan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**

