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Deputy Martin Browne,
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 20108/23 - To ask the Minister for Health his views on the cessation of 24-hour services at certain clinics providing sexual assault treatment services for children (details supplied); the reasons that led to this decision; his views on the transfer of similar services from a certain location to another location; if there are plans to address this shortfall in services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Browne,

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.

Thank you for raising your concerns regarding the cessation of 24-hour services at certain clinics providing sexual assault treatment services for children. I would like to emphasise the importance of recognising the distress and trauma experienced by these vulnerable individuals and the critical need for accessible and comprehensive services to support them.

Services for children who have experienced or are suspected to have experienced sexual assault are provided based on various factors, including available resources and delivery models. In line with the national plan adopting the Barnahus model of care, paediatric forensic medical services will be established in three Barnahus locations nationwide. The Barnahus model prioritises a multidisciplinary and interagency approach, facilitating collaboration between different entities within a child-friendly environment. This approach ensures that children can access care, health services, and engage with the criminal justice system without enduring further trauma or distress.

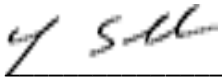
The agencies involved in the provision of Barnahus services are Tusla, the HSE, Children's Health Ireland, and An Garda Síochána. Currently, paediatric forensic medical services are available 24/7 at Barnahus West, with plans for extending services in Cork and CHI to operate seven days a week in the future. A working group is actively exploring options for rotating weekend and bank holiday cover between the different sites, considering the current demand for urgent examinations. As the development of these services progresses, the activity and demand for urgent examinations will be continuously reviewed to ensure an appropriate level of coverage across the three locations.

Recognising the distress and trauma experienced by children who have been subjected to sexual assault, it is crucial that we provide them with the necessary support and care. The establishment of Barnahus services represents a significant step towards ensuring comprehensive and coordinated assistance for these individuals. The ongoing review and development of these services will help address any potential shortfalls and ensure that the needs of the affected children are met effectively.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. We remain committed to continuously improving the services available to children who have experienced sexual assault and are dedicated to providing them with the support they deserve.

I trust the above information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

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

Yvonne Goff
National Director,
Change & Innovation