

6th March 2023

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 8066/23:

“To ask the Minister for Health the support offered by the HSE to a nursing home (details supplied); the dates on which the support was first and subsequently offered by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Details: the Health Service Executive offered to provide the nursing home with additional staffing or any other type of support during the period of the pandemic from January 2020 to date. CareChoice Ballynoe. Whites Cross, Ballynoe. Co. Cork

PQ ref 8091/23:

“To ask the Minister for Health if a nursing home (details supplied) was refused additional staff or any other type of support from the Health Service Executive during the period of the pandemic from January 2020 to date; if so, the dates on which the support was refused by the nursing home; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Details: CareChoice Ballynoe, Whites Cross, Ballynoe, Co. Cork

Dear Deputy McDonald,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Carechoice Ballynoe (known as Ballynoe) is a privately owned designated centre for older persons which is part of the Carechoice group.

At the onset of the pandemic, a substantial suite of support and guidance was developed and implemented for the nursing home sector, to include public, private and voluntary facilities. The HSE established a number of Residential Care & Home Support Covid-19 Response Teams (CRTs) to address COVID -19 outbreaks in their areas. These teams supported facilities to maximise care provided to residents, relative to their available levels of expertise.

The governance and management of each centre was the responsibility of each provider, in accordance with Regulations (HIQA /MHC) and the CRT’s role was to support these centres, as far as possible, while ensuring that the responsibility for the operation of the services and adherence to regulations rested with the Registered Provider. Each centre was required to prepare and have its own responses in place in relation to a likely Covid-19 outbreak and was obliged to fulfil its requirements under the regulations as inspected by HIQA.

The HSE also established extensive logistics at national and Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) level to provide weekly deliveries of PPE to all nursing homes during the pandemic. Nursing homes placed a weekly order for delivery of necessary stock. The CRT supported coordination of urgent deliveries of stock if required during outbreaks. Each nursing home provider had a legal responsibility

with regard to the provision of safe care to their residents and a safe working environment for their staff.

The Serial Testing Programme commenced in June 2020 and was a critical part of the ongoing response to COVID-19 in nursing homes which allowed for the early detection of cases and targeting of the early intervention of COVID-19 Response and Outbreak Control Teams.

All nursing homes, including public, private and voluntary facilities, were notified of the suite of supports available to them as the pandemic unfolded.

With regard to Care Choice Ballynoe, this facility is one of a chain of nursing homes owned by the Care Choice Group. The HSE had extensive communication and provided on-going support through its Covid Response Team (CRT) to nursing homes in the chain with outbreaks, including the Ballynoe facility.

The CRT was notified of an outbreak at Ballynoe on 8th January 2021. When notified of such outbreaks, an Outbreak Management Team is immediately convened by the Director of Public Health. In these instances, Public Health specialists and nurses work with the CRT to support private nursing homes through the provision of a range of supports including:

- Advice and support regarding the management of suspect cases and contact tracing
- Review of resident status at each outbreak control meeting
- Review of staff status at each outbreak control meeting
- Advice regarding the cohorting of residents
- Provision of and guidance regarding use of PPE
- Advice regarding visiting, transfers, admissions and discharges
- Provision of oxygen supplies to suspect or Covid positive residents.

Ballynoe is part of a chain of nursing homes and Care Choice management confirmed, at the first outbreak control meeting, that they had access to infection prevention and control resources and nursing staff and was also able to manage its staffing requirements through redeployment from other nursing homes and via agency staff. The centre would also be in receipt of funding from the Temporary Assistance Payment Scheme (Covid-19 TAPS) for nursing homes.

The Covid Response Team was in regular communication with Care Choice Ballynoe during the outbreak and, through the team, Consultant Geriatrician support was provided on an on-going basis to the GP who was providing the medical clinical service to the centre.

The HSE Covid Response Teams continued to provide any required support to nursing homes during Covid outbreaks. The nature of support varied but included oversight and management of an outbreak by a public health doctor, who was in turn supported by infectious diseases nurses, support from a Consultant Geriatrician to GPs and Directors of Nursing in relation to the clinical management of Covid positive residents, support from Clinical Nurse Managers on the Covid response team and other routine supports including the provision of oxygen, PPE and testing.

The HSE/CRT's designated role throughout the pandemic was to support residential centres; responsibility for the operation of services and adherence to regulations rested with the Registered Provider. The governance and management of each centre was and remains the responsibility of each provider.

I trust this clarifies the position. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older People

