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PQ ref: 13097/23

To ask the Minister for Health his plans to prescribe dedicated training for HSE-funded personnel administering sexually transmitted infection tests, and providing support to persons living with HIV to ensure that patients do not experience stigma in individual clinics.

Deputy Bacik,

Thank you for your question to the Minister for Health, which was forwarded to my office to respond to you directly.

The HSE funds STI testing in a range of settings:

Within HSE funded public STI/HIV services, STI testing is offered by appropriately trained healthcare personnel. In some instances, patients have the option to take their own samples, apart from blood testing, within the clinic setting.

Within the HSE funded free home STI testing service, users self-sample for STIs (including HIV) at a location of their choosing, following instructions provided by the service with supports available, from appropriately trained providers, to users who are experiencing difficulties with the process.

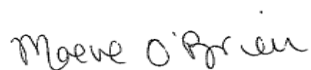
The HSE also provides funding to NGO partners to provide peer-led community HIV testing. This is provided by trained lay community providers. A National Surveillance System is in place to monitor the extent and effectiveness of community testing.

A training course on LGBT+ Awareness and Inclusion is available to both HSE and non HSE staff on HSEland. This course was designed to help all staff to develop an understanding of how they might make simple changes to their everyday practice to provide an enhanced service to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The HSE encourages all staff to complete this course <https://www.hseland.ie>.

Recent research has identified that people living with HIV are more likely to experience HIV related stigma in non HIV/sexual health care settings, such as other health sectors or in the community, due to lack of understanding about HIV transmission or negative attitudes and beliefs about people with HIV. Further research on healthcare setting related HIV stigma is ongoing and the findings of this work will inform further stigma campaigns. Of note, the HSE SHCPP Medical Director recently wrote an article for Health Professional News on HIV in 2023 and included the importance of recognising and addressing HIV related stigma. A recent survey of adult public HIV services found that the majority offer referral for peer support for those who are newly diagnosed with HIV, and have equality and diversity training available to staff working within HIV clinics.

Recognising that HIV related stigma is experienced by people living with HIV, the HSE ran a national HIV stigma campaign in February 2020, in collaboration with community stakeholders. This campaign highlighted the important message that someone on effective treatment cannot pass on HIV to sexual partners, this is also known as "U=U", undetectable equals untransmittable. This important message continues to be communicated through the relevant communications channels and the campaign will be repeated in 2023 along with a specific stigma campaign currently being developed with gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (gbMSM).

Yours Sincerely



Maeve O'Brien Interim Programme Lead
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