

25th September, 2023

Marian Harkin T.D.
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 37187/23

“To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the plans in place to deal with the lack of physiotherapy and occupational therapy services for children in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Physiotherapy and occupational therapy services being provided by CDNT, Nazareth House, Sligo

Dear Deputy Harkin

I refer to your recent correspondence in relation to Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy services being provided by Sligo South Donegal Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT), Nazareth House, Sligo. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The current physiotherapy staffing allocation in Sligo South Donegal Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT) is 5.53 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) of which 1.53 WTE are vacant. The current physiotherapy staffing consists of 2 WTE Senior Physiotherapists, 1 WTE Staff Grade Physiotherapist and 1 WTE Physiotherapy Assistant. The vacant posts are 1 WTE Senior Physiotherapist Special School Post and 0.53 WTE Staff Grade Physiotherapist. The vacant Senior Physiotherapist position has been accepted and the candidate is currently going through pre-employment clearances. Local HR are currently running a bespoke Staff Grade Physiotherapy campaign for CDNT, this position will be offered to the panel when formed.

The current Occupational Therapy (OT) staffing allocation in Sligo South Donegal CDNT is 6 WTE of which 4 WTE are vacant. The current staffing consists of 1 WTE Senior OT and 1 Staff Grade OT. The vacant posts are 1 WTE Senior OT, 1 WTE Staff Grade OT, 1 WTE OT Assistant and 1 WTE Senior OT Special Schools Post. Local HR are currently running bespoke campaigns for Senior OT’s and Staff Grade OT’s in the CDNTs. The OT Assistant position has been offered to the panel, and a job offer has been made for the Senior OT in the Special Schools Team



In line with Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People, intervention is needs led, not diagnostic led. A number of children have received physiotherapy more frequently than every nine weeks informed by their prioritised clinical need. Given the current staffing resource available, Sligo South Donegal CDNT is currently prioritising children with urgent priority one category issues. Where possible, Sligo South Donegal CDNT respond to children presenting with priority 2 and priority 3 issues which are triaged as they arise. A number of parental trainings typically delivered by the CDNT have been outsourced over the past year, in an effort to maximise available resources to best meet the needs of children in the service within available resources.

Sligo South Donegal CDNT also ran groups over the summer months in order to deliver more intervention to children and maximise the benefit of the physiotherapy assistant post within the team. Sligo South Donegal CDNT also plan to continue to provide a combination of universal, targeted and individualised therapy to maximise the use of the current staffing resources available. Contingency plans are in place to ensure that those children with the highest complex needs are prioritised to receive a service. Priority status is reviewed on a monthly basis as per the contingency plans in place.

Recruitment campaigns are ongoing for vacant posts, both through the HSE's National Recruitment Services and the Human Resources (HR) Department in Community Healthcare Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, Sligo (CH CDLMS). Staff grade posts are recruited by the HSE's National Recruitment Service, which holds national panels for staff grade clinicians across a range of disciplines. The HR department in CH CDLMS undertakes recruitment for senior grade clinical posts and due to failure to recruit staff grade posts from national panels, will also undertake recruitment to staff grade posts in CDNTs.

Nationally there are significant challenges in recruiting to posts within the health sector and CDNTs. There is a shortage of Health & Social Care Professionals as well as nursing grades across the country. It is understood that the three year Disability Action Plan and a Progressing Disability Services Roadmap are due to be published. It is understood that both will address a range of areas for development in Disability Services to include detail on a range of measures to be undertaken by various government departments and national HSE to address recruitment.

A number of CH CDLMS recruitment initiatives are already underway as set out in the following sections.

Attendance at job fairs in order to try to recruit to CDNT vacancies occurs across the CH CDLMS area. There are further job fairs taking place in Cavan, Leitrim, Inishowen and Sligo in Quarter 4 2023 and respective CDNT staff members along with HR Department staff will be in attendance. Additionally CDNTs are trying to attract new graduates into CDNT posts by further developing contacts and links with training colleges and supporting clinical education placements.



CH CDLMS established a bursary scheme in 2023, which will see 23 students in Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Dietetics supported to complete their professional degree programme in a UK based college. Of the 23 bursaries awarded, 12 of these will be assigned to posts in Disability Services. The first of the students to whom bursaries have been awarded will graduate in June 2024. CH CDLMS has committed to funding this bursary scheme for three years.

An extensive marketing campaign is planned in conjunction with CH CDLMS Comms office to promote CDNT job opportunities and careers. Advertising in Northern Ireland, wider UK and in specific publications to form part of recruitment advertising going forward supported by CH CDLMS Comms Department.

Sligo South Donegal CDNT continues to explore all options to recruit to vacant posts and in the interim has outsourced assessments to private providers to take the longest waiting children off the waiting list. Capacity within the private sector is also an issue due to staffing shortages.

Sligo South Donegal CDNT now holds a quarterly Family Forum meeting which provides an opportunity for engagement with families. Each Family Forum has two nominated parent representatives who attend the Community Healthcare Parent Representative Group.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edel Quinn'.

Edel Quinn
Head of Service Disability CH CDLMS
Ceann na Seirbhíse Míchumas
Eagraíocht Chúram Sláinte Limistéar CDLMS