



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,
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Deputy Violet- Anne Wynne.
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

06th February 2024

PQ Number: 4647/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health if he is aware that children with a primary diagnosis of autism are routinely refused support from CAMHS; the threshold or criteria set out in policy that allows these refusals to take place; and if the will make a statement on the matter. –Violet-Anne Wynne.

Dear Deputy Wynne,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

CAMHS provide specialist mental health services to those aged up to 18 years, who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorder that require the input of multi-disciplinary mental health teams. It is the role of the CAMHS team to determine if the child or adolescent reaches the threshold for specialist CAMHS services.

When deciding if a child or adolescent needs to attend CAMHS, a number of factors are considered by the CAMHS team. These include consideration of the child or adolescent's clinical presentation, their level of social and family support and the availability of resources and treatment options at primary care level or within community networks.

The CAMHS Operational Guidelines (2019), set out the criteria for the types of referrals suitable for CAMHS and the types of referrals not suitable for CAMHS.

Section 4.2 of the CAMHS Operational Guideline (2019), set out the referral and access criteria. Children or adolescents referred to community CAMHS must meet the following criteria:

- The child or adolescent is under 18 years old
- Consent for the referral has been obtained from the parent(s)
- The child or adolescent presents with a suspected moderate to severe mental disorder
- Comprehensive treatment at primary care level has been unsuccessful or was not appropriate in the first instance

Types of Referrals Suitable for CAMHS

The list below gives some guidance on what constitutes a moderate to severe mental disorder. However, it is important to note that the CAMHS Operational Guideline is not a clinical guideline, therefore not all children or young person will fit neatly into a diagnostic category:



- Moderate to severe Anxiety disorders
- Moderate to severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder/ Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD/ADD)
- Moderate to severe Depression
- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Psychosis
- Moderate to severe Eating Disorder
- Suicidal ideation in the context of a mental disorder

Types of Referrals Not Suitable for CAMHS

CAMHS is not suitable for children or adolescents whose difficulties primarily are related to learning problems, social problems, behavioral problems or mild mental health problems. There are many services available to respond to these needs for children and adolescents, e.g. HSE Primary Care Services, HSE Disability Services, Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, Jigsaw, National Educational Psychology Services (NEPS) and local Family Resource Centres.

CAMHS does not accept the following children or adolescents where there is no evidence of a moderate to severe mental disorder present:

- Those with an intellectual disability. Their diagnostic and support needs are best met in HSE Social Care/HSE Disability Services. However those children or adolescents with a mild intellectual disability with moderate to severe mental disorder are appropriate to be seen by CAMHS
- Those with a moderate to severe intellectual disability and moderate to severe mental disorder. Their needs are best met by CAMHS Mental Health Intellectual Disability (MHID) teams
- Those whose presentation is a developmental disorder. Examples of these could include Dyslexia or Developmental Coordination Disorder. Their needs are best met in HSE Primary Care services and/or Children’s Disability Network Teams
- Those who require assessments or interventions that relate to educational needs. Their needs are best met in services such as Children’s Disability Network Teams or the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)
- Those who present with child protection or welfare issues where there is no moderate to severe mental disorder present. Their needs are best met by Tusla – The Child and Family Agency
- Those who have a primary diagnosis of Autism. Their needs are generally best met in services such as HSE Primary Care and/or HSE Disability Services. Where the child or adolescent presents with more complex needs, for example, with a moderate to severe mental disorder and autism, it is the role of CAMHS to work with disability teams to treat the mental health disorder associated with the primary diagnosis of autism

The HSE service best suited to a child or adolescent is determined by the level of the mental health difficulty. When information indicates that there is more than one HSE service that could best meet the child or adolescent’s needs, consultation should take place with the other service to determine which is the most appropriate or whether a joint approach to assessment and intervention is indicated.

Further information can be found by consulting with the CAMHS Operational Guidelines. Please see below:



<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs/operational-guideline/camhs-operational-guideline-2019.pdf>

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sarah Hennessey'.

Sarah Hennessey
General Manager
Child and Youth Mental Health Office