



Oifig an Stiúthóra Náisiúnta um Rochtain agus Imeachadh

Aonad 4A, Áras Dargan, An Ceantar Theas, An Bóthar Míleata, Cill Mhaighneann, Baile Átha Cliath 8, D08 NN9V

Office of the National Director
Access and Integration

Unit 4a, the Dargan Building, Heuston
South Quarter, Military Road,
Kilmainham, Dublin 8, D08 NN9V

www.hse.ie
@hselive

Tel: 01 795 9971
Email: acute.operations@hse.ie

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

19th June 2024

Re: 24991/24

***To ask the Minister for Health if the lack of availability of pathologists to carry out post mortems will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.
-Michael Healy-Rae***

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

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.

Response:

Thank you very much for your PQ and in particular for highlighting this important issue. Your sensitive description of the experience and impact of delays in the post-mortem examination process is a very important issue to address for our communities.

You may be aware that the vast majority of post-mortem examinations are directed by the local Coroner. The provision of a Coronial post-mortem examination service is the responsibility of each Coroner and the Department of Justice. The HSE supports the Coroners and the Department of Justice with this by providing access to the HSE's diagnostic post-mortem service.

Recognising the impact that a bereavement can have on a family and a community, since 2017, the HSE has put in place a range of initiatives and actions to improve the experience of death and bereavement across our hospitals. This work has been undertaken in close collaboration with the Irish Hospice Foundation. A full list of actions can be provided if required.

On the specifics of the post-mortem service, the HSE and Department of Justice now work in close collaboration to ensure the availability of post-mortem capacity across hospitals. Unfortunately, the current availability of Histopathologists with appropriate qualifications and training in post-mortems for recruitment is very challenging. Currently, there is also no contractual requirement for a Histopathologist to undertake post-mortems as part of their duties, which can lead to difficulties for hospitals who wish to support their local Coroner.

Working in close collaboration with the Faculty of the Pathology, a new Consultant Histopathology job description with a special interest in Autopsy has been developed and is due to review at the July meeting of the Consultant Applications Advisory Committee. If approved, this will allow the HSE to advertise and recruit appropriately qualified Histopathologists who can focus on and provide a post-mortem examination service for local Coroners.



Please also be aware that the HSE has developed specific new guidance on post-mortem examinations (<https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/635255>) which defines the best practice for post-mortem practitioners, particularly, how to communicate with families on the need and results of a post-mortem examination.

As part of our National Communications Programme, during 2023, the HSE focused on developing training supports for clinicians who must deal with families where their loved one may be referred for a post-mortem examination (https://players.brightcove.net/6270243571001/default_default/index.html?videoid=6340227307112).

We hope that this supported training approach and a range of other support materials (e.g. leaflets, information booklets, signposting advice, etc.) can help families more effectively cope.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ciaran Browne'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Ciaran Browne
Office of the National Director Access and Integration – HSE