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Mr Roderic O’Gorman, TD
Dáil Éireann,
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PQ 21672/25 – “To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the service pathway for children referred to speech and language therapy in in HSE Dublin north west: the waiting time for children in this area to access speech and language therapy; if there is prioritization system for children on the waiting list; if children who are non-verbal given prioritisation; the pathway for young children under five years; the evidence for providing services in blocks of therapy, regardless of severity of communication issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter” - Roderic O’Gorman TD

Dear Deputy O’Gorman,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Service pathway for children referred to Speech & Language Therapy in HSE Dublin North West

Integrated Health Areas of Dublin North City & West Primary Care Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) service which incorporates the four network areas for Blakestown, Blanchardstown, Finglas and Cabra operate an open referral pathway, meaning parents/guardians or anyone with permission from parents/guardians, can refer to this service, these referrals are reviewed by a senior Speech and Language Therapist. The SLT department provide a service for children with communication difficulties including children with a disability and non-complex needs under the National Access Policy.

On acceptance to this service, where appropriate families are sign posted to online resources including a webinar on supporting SLT development. Children are wait listed chronologically for initial assessment. Based on the outcome of this assessment they are offered intervention, or discharged if no communication needs are identified. In some situations, children may be referred on to a more appropriate service.

Waiting time for children in this area to access speech and language therapy?

Currently children are waiting for Initial assessment and Initial therapy within Dublin North West 32 months.

Is there a prioritisation system for children on the waiting list?

There is currently no priority system for access to this service.

Are children who are non-verbal given prioritisation:

The Primary Care Speech & Language Therapy service offer assessment and intervention largely based on date of referral and this also applies to Non-verbal children who have significant communication delays. The service aim to offer parent mediated workshops such as “More Than Words” which is an appropriate intervention for some non-verbal children. A child being non-verbal may be part of a more complex presentation, if this is the case the Speech & Language Therapist would request transfer to the Children Disability Network Teams. Parents are communicated with throughout the process and referring services recognise any time waiting if a transfer to another service is required.

What is the pathway for young children under 5?

There is no specific pathways for children under 5. Children are waitlisted for interventions based on their profile of need. Interventions are evidence informed and the service has a broad scope. This includes children with a wide range of speech, language, stammering, voice and social communication differences.

Children under 5 may access a variety of interventions including parent mediated interventions such as Elklan Lets Talk With Under 5s, Hanen More Than Words, Palin Parent Child Interaction Therapy. Children may also access direct 1:1 or group therapy.

What is the evidence for providing services in blocks of therapy, regardless of severity of communication issues?

There is no clinical evidence to support a gap between assessment and therapy. Separate waiting lists and waiting times exist due to current resources. The waiting lists are in existence due to the large population in the Dublin North West area, staffing and the ongoing demand for services.

In efforts to shorten waiting times:

- Group therapy is provided when clinically appropriate, group therapy facilitates seeing as many children as possible at the same time while meeting their needs.
- The waiting times for parent mediated interventions are managed across the networks in the Dublin North West SLT area.

This ensures that waiting times are equalised across networks for these interventions. Where possible these interventions are offered within twelve months of referral.

- Support or cover is provided to clinics who may have vacancies if available.
- We review service provision to identify scope for efficiencies and to ensure effective care.
- Constant focus on evidence based service provision and adaptation by supporting staff in continuous professional development

Support to those who are waiting for assessment and intervention

- An information talk and resource pack is provided to parents of children under 6 years of age who are waiting for assessment. This provides information on early speech and language development and how to support communication development at home.
- An information talk is provided to parents of children who stammer while waiting for assessment.
- We are developing a drop in advice clinic to support those waiting for our service.
- At the point of assessment advice, information and sign posting is provided to relevant support services or clinical resources.
- Where there is a gap between interventions we may offer a review appointment to ensure some support is provided during a waiting period.

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,

Karina McDermott
Acting General Manager Primary Care
Dublin North City & West