

20th February, 2024

Mr Liam Quaide, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 2596/25

"To ask the Minister for Health if redeployment of psychologists to primary care services in the south west regional health area will be pursued by the HSE to address critical waiting lists there; if she has engaged with unions regarding the potential impact of this workforce strategy on retention of psychologists as well as on the services from which psychologists will be redeployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy Quaide,

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.

We are actively recruiting to fill long-standing psychology vacancies across all areas of Cork and Kerry and a number of posts are at various stages of recruitment, some with commencement dates between January – March 2025.

Having considered the psychology risks for the region, HSE South West has advertised a Director of Psychology to provide adequate governance overall for psychology services in the region. This is to ensure that limited resources can be reviewed and reconfigured based on population needs. Priority will need to be given to critical services such as primary care to help reduce waiting times and bringing the timelines for children awaiting psychological supports within the Slaintecare targets.

Given the significant backlog and cumulative increase in the rate of referral to Primary Care Services, a significant increase in staffing is required to be in a position to meet these targets. Where psychologists are not in place, a skill mix will be considered where other professionally trained staff can offer a level of therapeutic support to children and families to meet children's needs. Whilst awaiting the Director of Psychology recruitment, senior management locally are presently proactively working with the Psychology Managers in Primary Care and Mental Health Services in the region to optimise access to psychological services as far as possible.

The aim of this is to implement a transformative model which will not only address the timelines associated with psychology services, but also identify alternative suitable pathways which can be offered to parents/guardians and children as more timely measures to address some presenting needs whilst they await expert clinical supports, treatment and care.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Aisling Lenihan
Acting Head of Service - Primary Care,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare