

**Príomhoifigeach Daoine**

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David Cullinane, TD

08 April 2025

PQ 14071/25 (Health): To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE recruitment embargo applies to the recruitment of physician's associates; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your recent PQ which was sent to the HSE for response.

By way of providing context, there have been unprecedented and very welcome levels of additional Government investment in health in recent years and this has enabled significant expansion in our workforce by +25,768 WTE, equating to a 25.4% increase overall since December 2019, with 7,578 WTE of these arriving in 2023. Despite this very welcome investment, the cost of running our existing services at current levels over 2024 was noted to be a significant challenge in the context of the total funding available to the health service in 2024.

Subsequently to productive engagement trilaterally between the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure NDP and Reform, and the HSE, a Two-Year Expenditure Framework Agreement for 2024 and 2025 was agreed. This formed the basis of this year's Pay and Numbers Strategy for Department of health funded services and saw a new approved maximum Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) staff figure for the HSE of 129,753. (excluding disability services provided by the HSE and its Section 38 organisations in that sector, pre-registration nursing and midwifery students, and 76 special assignment temporary posts).

The CEO of the HSE welcomed this positive step, and the fact that there is now a two-year line of sight of both the HSE budget and the size of the workforce to work within.

Regarding recruiting physician's associates (PA), I can confirm the HSE has paused the recruitment of physician assistants, as the HSE have committed to carrying out an assessment of the role to ensure appropriate deployment. Physician Assistants are not regulated by any of the Irish health regulators and the HSE must ensure that the appropriate and standardised governance arrangements are in place before further growth in the numbers employed.

The terms of reference have been completed and shared with the Department of Health. The HSE is expecting to establish the review by the end of March/early April and the HSE National Service Plan is committed to the review of the PA role. Working with the Department of Health the HSE has submitted this project to the Slaintecare Integration Innovation Fund. The aim of the project is for an independent expert will carry out a comprehensive assessment of the physician assistant role internationally and make recommendations for standardisation, scope of practice, and appropriate deployment in Ireland, and will report within six months (2025 National Service Plan).

I trust this is of some assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Mairéad Ryan
National HR