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1st October 2025

Deputy Michael Lowry
Abbey Road
Thurles
Co. Tipperary

Re: PQ 49533/25 - "To ask the Minister for Health if she will provide an update on the provision of special needs dental services in Nenagh, if she is aware that the post of special needs dentist has been vacant for over a year with no replacement appointment, despite advertisements; the number of children, including those with autism, currently waiting for dental treatment under sedation or anaesthetic in the Nenagh area; the contingency plans in place to ensure access to appropriate dental care for these children; and if she will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy Lowry,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in regard to your parliamentary question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The Principal Dental Surgeon confirmed that the Snr. Dental Surgeon (Special Needs) post in Nenagh became vacant in February 2024 following the resignation of the post holder. The HSE Mid West advertised the post on three occasions, the first competition attracted one suitably qualified candidate who failed to attend for interview and the other two competitions failed to attract any interested candidates.

The Community Dental Service is responsible for dental services for children up to the age of 16. The Community Dental Service carry out School Dental Examinations for children in the target classes and any necessary dental treatment is carried out. If any child, is experiencing dental pain/sepsis they are entitled to attend a HSE Emergency Dental Clinic operated by the Community Dental Service. A parent/guardian must contact their local Dental Clinic to arrange an emergency appointment for the child to be seen and the examining Dental Surgeon will provide treatment for the presenting dental pain/sepsis.

Children (including those with additional needs) who require dental extraction/restorative dental treatment under General Anaesthetic (GA) are referred for a Dental GA by the examining HSE Dental Surgeon and the child is added to the waiting list which is held by the Community Dental Service. The waiting list is made up of children from across the HSE Mid West area i.e. Clare, Limerick and Nth. Tipperary. Dental GA sessions are facilitated at both University Hospital Limerick (all under 5s) and Nenagh Hospital. The Community Dental Service has limited access to GA sessions in both hospitals and as with all specialities, access to Dental GA sessions is dependent on the availability of resources within the hospital i.e. access to theatre, staffing, etc.



The Principal Dental Surgeon has provided the following breakdown in respect of the patients currently waitlisted by the Community Dental Service for dental extraction/restorative dental treatment under Dental GA:

Breakdown in the number of patients currently on waiting lists to receive dental extraction and/or restorative dental treatment under GA @ 30/09/2025	
No. of children awaiting dental extraction <u>only</u> under GA	636
No. of patients with additional needs awaiting restorative dental treatment and/or extraction under GA	81
Children under 5 - have to be seen at UHL as there must be a Paediatric Ward on site in case of an emergency.	56

The Principal Dental Surgeon also provided a breakdown in the number of patients from across the HSE Mid West area who have received dental extraction and/or restorative dental treatment under Dental GA between 1st January 2025 and 30th September 2025 at University Hospital Limerick and Nenagh General Hospital:

Name of Hospital where treatment was carried out and description of dental treatment carried out under GA:	No. of patients treated
University Hospital Limerick – under 5s	83
Nenagh General Hospital – Dental Extraction <u>only</u> (children under 16)	231
Nenagh General Hospital – Children under 16 with additional needs who required restorative dental treatment and dental extraction	10
Nenagh General Hospital – Patients over 16 with additional needs who required restorative dental treatment and dental extraction	12
Total	336

The HSE Dental Service was fortunate that the former Snr. Dental Surgeon (Special Needs) in Nenagh was in a position to provide inhalational sedation for patients in Nenagh Dental Clinic as the Dental Clinic is on the grounds of Nenagh Hospital and there was an Anesthetist on site if required in the case of an emergency.

I can assure you that I am working closely with the Principal Dental Surgeon and we are exploring all options/contingency plans in relation to the filling of the vacant Snr. Dental Surgeon role for the Nenagh area, which is a vital role within the Community Dental Service.

I trust the above information addresses the issues raised in your representation.

Yours sincerely,

Carmel McLaughlin
General Manager Primary Care