



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Minutes of Special Meeting of the HSE Board Meeting

Ref: COVID -19

A meeting of the Board of the Health Service Executive was held on Thursday 12 March 2020 at 7:00pm. This meeting was held via telecon.

Present: Ciarán Devane (Chairperson), Deirdre Madden (Deputy Chairperson), Aogan Ó Fearghaíl, Brendan Lenihan, Fergus Finlay, Fiona Ross, Yvonne Traynor, Tim Hynes, Sarah McLoughlin.

In Attendance for Board Meeting:

Paul Reid (CEO), Colm Henry (CCO) Dean Sullivan (CSO), Anne O'Connor (COO), Stephen Mulvany (CFO) Anne Marie Hoey (ND HR), Paul Connors (ND Communications), Fran Thompson (CIO), Geraldine Smith (ND Internal Audit) Dara Purcell (Secretary), John Kelly (Corporate Affairs).

Chair welcomed members to meeting which was called to review the ongoing response to the COVID-19 challenge.

The CEO briefed the Board on the latest position in relation to the COVID-19 crisis. It was discussed that there had been a significant increase in recent days in the number of cases detected, a number of clusters in hospital settings with some cases in intensive care and a number of cases arising from community transmissions. The HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre) has been informed of 27 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ireland. There are now 70 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the HSE is now working rapidly to identify any contacts the patients may have had, to provide them with information and advice to prevent further spread. New advice provided by ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) has highlighted that the detection of COVID-19 cases and deaths outside of known chains of transmission is a strong signal that social distancing should be considered. The ECDC also recommended that the measures should be taken early and should be decisive, rapid, co-ordinated and comprehensive.

The CEO confirmed that based on ECDC recommendations, the National Public Health Emergency Team has recommended that Ireland move from the “containment” phase to the “delay” phase which is designed to interrupt the transmission of COVID-19 by advising reductions on social interactions. In response to this advice, the Taoiseach announced new measures as part of the effort to interrupt the transmission of COVID-19 and announced that the Government would put in place important and unprecedented measures to protect public health.

The CEO highlighted that as the numbers diagnosed with COVID-19 continue to rise and as we have moved from the “containment” to the “delay” phase, our response as a health service will now be changed accordingly.

The CEO informed the Board of the ongoing engagements he had been having with the Taoiseach, Ministers and Secretaries General in both DPER and the Department of Health and other colleagues in other State Agencies to assist in managing COVID-19. It was welcomed and acknowledged that the private sector has also proactively engaged with the HSE, with exceptionally helpful offers of support and that the whole of government strategy is being finalised to support the response.

The HSE’s highest priorities in the response to COVID-19 are;

- To contain COVID-19 and to prevent community transmission for as long as possible in order to allow the longest time possible for preparation and to mitigate the effects of the virus on the population should the number of cases increase.
- Immediate decanting of hospitals to the greatest extent possible – Delayed Transfers of Care
- Developing and scaling Community Services based responses
- Increasing Acute, Critical Care and Ambulance Capacity
- Protecting Vulnerable People
- Building and galvanising community awareness and preventative action

The Board reviewed the HSE actions already initiated to maximise its available capacity for the period ahead (e.g. expansion of ICU beds, transfer of patients from hospital to appropriate settings, expansion of workforce through avoidance of leave, acceleration of recruitment and return to work for key workers who have retired).

The Board noted that a high-level Government Action Plan is being developed which will include the health services submission. Senior Officials Group working with the Department of Health, the HSE, health agencies and services are developing the comprehensive plan with both health and ‘non-

health' that will need to be implemented to support health and social care services in responding to COVID-19, and that the Plan (which will be iterated in response to the dynamically changing situation) will be presented to the Cabinet Committee and Government in the coming days. The HSE priorities considered above will form part of the submission to Government.

Following the CEO's briefing, the Board reviewed with the CEO and EMT the clinical response, communication, and the work of the National Operations team.

1. Clinical Response

It was noted that public health professionals are leading the health service response to COVID-19 and the HSE will continue to build on their excellent approach and work. The HSE will reinforce this key group through additional recruitment and redeployment. Key experts have been drawn together to develop a specific a COVID-19 Model of Care. This will address the care needs of both infected and uninfected patients. The Model of Care will describe the advice to those who can stay at home, the pathways they can use if they suspect they have COVID-19, what healthcare workers do from the initial point of contact and how they can facilitate and support care at home. It will give guidance on the assessment of patients once the need to see a clinician arises and will describe admission criteria. The course of the patient in hospital will also be described. The potential pathways are from patient referral to test sites, community assessment hubs, intermediate care in the community and care in the acute hospital setting. The pathway is not unidirectional and patients may require different levels of care at different stages in the illness.

Reducing transmission in the first instance and reducing the impact when a person becomes infected remain the HSE's highest priorities. Once Ireland enters a more extensive period of community transmission, the hospital system will not withstand the demands placed upon them, regardless of what additional capacity is put in place. However, additional capacity will help hospitals mitigate the worst of the impact.

2. Communications

HSE Communications teams have established a dedicated structure for communications work in response to COVID-19. The strategy is to provide clear information governance, and swift, high-quality, co-ordinated work. www.hse.ie dedicated pages on COVID-19 have been in place since early 2020 and have been the primary source of health advice and information to everyone in Ireland on this topic.

HSE Communications have also been active across a number of media platforms, including social media. A COVID-19 Clinical Communications subgroup has been established with GP representatives, the HSE, INMO and ICGP. The aim of the group is to provide advice on the operational response to the virus with a focus on the communication needs of clinicians and managers and gathering questions to submit to the Expert Advisory Group and to act as clinical spokespeople on the HSE response to the virus. A number of videos have been produced on the use of Personal Protective Equipment, infection control techniques and a further video is in production with more general public health information for HSE staff and the public.

A number of radio and television advertisements are also being launched and a national household booklet will be delivered to all homes around March 20-23. Social Media content is being monitored to deal with false and inaccurate information as much as practical. Call centres providing information to the public and support to the public health and contact tracing process are in place with media relations and strategy. Weekly briefings are held with the media and spokespeople are doing interviews.

3. National Operations Teams

The Board was briefed on the work of the National Operations Teams which has been mobilised in Dr Steevens and whose three key priorities are increasing testing capacity, the procuring of the continuous supply of PPE equipment and increasing bed capacity across the country. The challenge is to ensure sufficient capacity and resilience across the workforce.

The Board discussed how business as usual would be transacted in the crisis period noting the scope of the HSE's responsibility continues to extend to both COVID-19 related activities and also all other ongoing activities in Service Plan 2020. It is likely that the provision of these other services as envisioned in Service Plan 2020 will be fundamentally and negatively impacted. The Board, in consultation with the CEO and EMT, will need to assess the impact and shortfalls on the delivery of the key priorities, actions and activity levels set out in Service Plan 2020 and consider the implications.

Following in depth discussion and questions put to the EMT, the Chairperson thanked the CEO and members of the EMT for their ongoing contributions and it was agreed that the Chair would on behalf of the Board write to the CEO acknowledging and thanking every staff member for all that they are doing during this unprecedented and difficult time.

The meeting concluded at 20.15pm.

Signed: Ciarán Devane.

Ciarán Devane

Chairperson

Date: 27/03/2020