



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Minutes of HSE Board Meeting

A meeting of the Board of the Health Service Executive was held on Monday 9 March 2020 at 6:30pm by teleconference.

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

In Attendance for Board Meeting:

Paul Reid (CEO), Colm Henry (CCO), Anne O’Connor (COO), Stephen Mulvany (CFO), Paul Connors (ND Communications), Joe Ryan, John Kelly, Dara Purcell (Secretary).

1. Covid 19 - briefing

The Chairperson, Ciarán Devane welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies. He confirmed the purpose of this special meeting of the Board was to allow the CEO to brief the Board on the next immediate phase of scaling up of the HSE’s response to COVID-19 and to agree how the Board would engage with the Executive as they manage the crisis.

The CEO informed the Board that the scale of the challenge facing the health system in Ireland from COVID-19 is unprecedented. The response requires urgent investment in all available capacity in both acute and community settings. The model of care for patients must focus toward community provision to the greatest extent possible as this presents the greatest opportunity to scale up the response at speed. Modelling suggests that when we enter a more extensive period of community transmission, the hospital system will not withstand the demands regardless of what additional capacity is put in place. As such planning will have to focus heavily on the management and containment of infection within community settings.

He outlined to the Board the HSE’s planned 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 – addressing 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 CEO confirmed that an additional €430m investment had been approved for the Health Service by the Cabinet for these measures. He stressed that the likelihood is that the actual demand for services will significantly exceed the additional capacity described in the scaling up model. This proposal represents the HSE's current view of what is possible to leverage from existing infrastructure and will only address a limited level of response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the event that the volume of presentations is realised as anticipated from the as yet unfinished population modelling. Social measures are therefore critical to managing the epidemic.

The CEO briefed the Board on the wider cross-Government actions to support the health service COVID-19 response, which included meetings with Secretaries General in Departments of Health Finance and Taoiseach. Government has a special Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach to assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of COVID-19 and oversee the cross-Government response. The CEO attends these meetings.

Demand in line with the population modelling will require activation of the Major Emergency Framework, urgent engagement with specific Principle Response Agencies, e.g. Defense Forces, An Garda Síochána and identification of pan-agency actions based on specific decision points, e.g. moving from containment to mitigation. These steps are all underway.

Following the CEO briefing the Board discussed the potential impact on the population of the virus in the coming weeks based on the early insight from Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer, to the modelling due in the coming days that indicates that the biggest surge in demand will come early i.e. in the first three weeks of peak demand. This population modelling suggests a population attack rate of between 25% and 50%, this will produce service demand beyond anything previously experienced. There is currently a moderate to high risk that COVID-19 will become established in Ireland in the coming weeks, in a manner similar to that seen in Italy and it is expected that Ireland will see a rapid increase in numbers of confirmed cases. If it does become established here, it is likely that this will happen quickly and that most cases will occur over the following 12 weeks.

The Board emphasised the need for cohesive and authoritative communications in order to encourage good citizenship and inform and reassure the public about the increasing challenges to come for the health and social care service and across Government, including increasing demands on health service capacity; increasing numbers of affected workers especially healthcare and other essential workers.

The Board welcomed the multi-agency, whole of government approach in place and, as part of this approach, the Board discussed and noted the general principles about changes that may be necessary over the forthcoming period:

1. Recognising the unique and rapidly changing environment pertaining and to ensure the effective operation of the multi-agency approach the Board provided a mandate to the CEO to make the necessary decisions as required within the All-of-Government approach and multi-agency approach.

2. Given its significance, that the Board will engage as a whole on this matter and that there was no advantage in delegating engagement to a sub-group of the Board.
3. The CEO will consult with the Chairman to ensure conference calls with the Board are arranged as required at key milestones over the coming days/weeks.
4. Board members will provide any suggestions, queries or concerns to the Chairman and Secretariat who will ensure replies are turned around quickly.
5. Regular updates/information will be provided to the Board, including using existing internal and external Communications materials from Paul Connors, ND Communications.

The Board thanked the CEO and his team for the work being done to manage this unprecedented situation and recognised the enormous efforts being made by HSE staff across the country to deliver the public health response to date.

The meeting concluded at 8pm.

Signed: Ciarán Devane

Ciarán Devane
Chairperson

Date: 27/03/2020