



24<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

Deputy Patrick Costello, TD  
Dáil Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2.

**REPDR/20/03823**

To whom it may concern, I am writing to you on behalf of a constituent of mine in relation to the access of the drug Naloxone. As I'm sure you know Naloxone is an antidote needed to treat acute opiate overdose. International studies have shown the benefits of naloxone and the lifesaving effects access to it has. This is also something I personally have witnessed in my former professional capacity as a social worker on Merchants Quay when working in addiction services. Many officials, healthcare workers and journalists have covered this issue extensively and highlighted to medical benefits of the drug. Ronan Duffy for example cited the success of a more expansive scheme in Northern Ireland; "New research has now shown that, over the last five years in Northern Ireland, Naloxone was administered 112 times and has been successful in reversing an overdose on 98 occasions." I therefore wish to ask the HSE about the current policy on the distribution of the drug – who has access to it and how does that get decided and/or allocated? Also what, if any, plans are currently afoot to increase the ease of access for those in need?

Dear Deputy Costello,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above representations which you submitted. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

In the first instance, I would like to confirm that the HSE Addiction services are fully in support of the use of Naloxone as a response to opioid overdose and actively promote the use of this substance particularly during the current Covid 19 pandemic. Since 2015 when the HSE launched the Naloxone Demonstration Project the HSE has been expanding the availability of this substance in line with action 2.2.30 of the National Drugs and Alcohol strategy. Please find below a link to the Evaluation report of the Naloxone Demonstration Project published in 2016

<http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/26037/1/Naloxonedemoproject.pdf>

Naloxone is a prescription only medication that requires training to administer. Initially available as an injectable product only in Ireland, since 31<sup>st</sup> August 2018 it has also been available as an intranasal preparation. Since the introduction in Ireland in 2018, the HSE has made intranasal naloxone available to services along with the injectable product. The HSE National Social Inclusion office coordinates the distribution and supply of both naloxone products to services and funded agencies.

Training for staff, peers and family members in the administration of the substance is also organised by the National Social inclusion office. Training has taken place in all CHO areas and this year further training was



organised for the Irish Prison Service. In 2019, 510 people were trained in the administration of Naloxone and training has been refined to include both the use of the Intranasal product and adapted to take into consideration the Covid 19 pandemic.

From 2015 to December 2019 a total of 4200 packs of prenoxad (injectable naloxone) were supplied and 1600 packs of nyxoid (intranasal naloxone available since 2018) were supplied. In addition 85 packs of nyxoid (intranasal naloxone) have been provided to prisoners who received training on administration prior to release by the Irish Prison Service.

Since February of this year the HSE Addiction services have been responding proactively to the Covid 19 pandemic. This response included a specific response in relation to overdose as this was perceived to be a period of risk for people who use opioid drugs. All new people who commenced on Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) were provided with naloxone and any person already attending services deemed to be at risk was provided with naloxone. As a point of information, an additional 670 people were commenced on OST in the first 6 months of 2020.

New resources in relation to overdose awareness were developed and put on the HSE Social Inclusion Microsite <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/other-areas/health-inequalities/overdose-information-for-staff-with-clients-on-ost-in-isolation.pdf>

Further information was posted on the drugs.ie website about Overdose Awareness and the information about the administration of naloxone was updated. The information about overdose awareness include the poster developed in conjunction with the Department of Health [http://www.drugs.ie/resources/covid/overdose\\_awareness\\_during\\_covid\\_19\\_pandemic/](http://www.drugs.ie/resources/covid/overdose_awareness_during_covid_19_pandemic/)

The updated information in relation to Naloxone includes the poster developed by the service user representative group UISCE for widespread use in services <http://www.drugs.ie/resources/naloxone/>

The proactive response by the HSE in relation to naloxone has resulted in distribution of as much product in the first quarter of 2020 as in the whole of 2019. We continue to supply naloxone when requested by services or funded agencies. We are also aware of the administration of naloxone on 35 occasions in 2020, potentially saving 35 lives in the process.

In May of 2020, as a result of requests from services and the HSE, the National Council of Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) recommended that intranasal naloxone be considered for reimbursement by the PCRS. This will result in intranasal naloxone being available free of charge for medical card holders.

In summary, there has been substantial progress in the supply and distribution of naloxone by the HSE Social Inclusion office and we are committed to continuing the expansion of this life saving medication.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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Dr. Eamon Keenan  
National Clinical Lead – Addiction Services