



Date: 23rd December, 2022

Circular Number: NCO-23-2022

Temporary Supports for General Practice – Winter Pressures

Dear Doctor,

As I am sure you will be aware our health services across General Practice, community and acute hospitals are currently experiencing extraordinary pressures associated with exceptional increases in influenza, Covid, respiratory and other viruses. It is clear that during this winter we will require a strong coordinated and integrated approach across these services if we are to successfully respond to current and anticipated levels of activity and demand. The HSE and the Department of Health fully acknowledge the exceptional contribution made by General Practice throughout the Pandemic and vaccination programme to-date, and recognise the challenges now posed by the current wave.

The current pressure is expected to last a number of weeks and the following day time arrangements will be in place with immediate effect until end January 2023 while the Out of Hours arrangements will apply until the end of February 2023.

I wish to advise that in the above context, the HSE with the support of the Department of Health and following consultation and engagement with the Irish Medical Organisation have agreed to introduce a number of General Practice service oriented support measures for both day-time general practice and out-of-hours services through GP Co-ops.

The Support measures are outlined hereunder.

1. Day Time General Practice

General Practice will continue to experience significant and additional patient demand for the coming weeks. The HSE will introduce the following measures to enable GPs to extend existing clinics or run additional clinics with STC supports and grants towards operational costs.

The STC Rate of €41.63 will be available to GPs for GMS patients from 5pm – 7pm (inclusive) Monday to Friday and from 9am -1pm (inclusive) on Saturday. It is recognised that all GP sessions are a mix of GMS and private patients and that practice should continue for the extended/additional sessions with private patients paying as normal and in line with practice policy.

It is recognised that not all practices will be in a position to undertake the additional hours and it is further acknowledged that there is a requirement to protect GP time in terms of their commitment to Out of Hours services, which will continue to operate during these hours.



In addition to the STC payment model the following Ancillary Support Grant support will be available to assist in the operation of the additional sessions:

Each GMS GP in participating practices GP's will receive once off support payments for the period to end January as follows:

- GP's with panel size of 1,001 or more whose practice operate extended/additional Clinics on at least 2 weeknights each week and at least 3 Saturday mornings for the period to end January will receive €1,500
- GPs with panel size of between 501 and 1,000 whose practice operate extended/additional clinics on at least 2 weeknights each week and at least 3 Saturday mornings for the period to end January will receive €1,350
- GP's with Panel size of between 101 & 500 whose practice operate extended/additional clinics on 2 or more weeknights and at least 3 Saturdays morning for the period to end January will receive €1,200
- GMS GP's whose practice operate extended/additional clinics on less than 2 evenings a week (but at least one evening) and no Saturday morning clinics for the period to end January will receive €1,000

All claims for reimbursement are to be submitted in the normal way for STCs through PCRS online portal or manual in line with existing practice protocols and should be submitted within two working days of the consultation date. In line with existing practices all forms must be signed by the individual patient noting the date and time of consultation.

The grant will be claimable at the end of this period and further detail with regard to claiming the grant will issue in due course. In line with normal administrative procedures, the HSE reserves the right to audit all claims and relevant practice records pertaining to such consultations which will need to be accessible to HSE for such purposes. These measures are exceptional in nature, time bound and do not erode, substitute for or replace existing legislative, circular or contractual terms pertaining to the General Medical Services Contract with GPs.

2. Out Of Hours

Since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in March, 2020 GP out of Hours Co-ops with the objective have been funded under a grant arrangement which was based on 2019 GMS funding and activity levels. It is recognised that the Out of Hours service activity levels have since increased with a particular focus on increased levels of triage. In this context, the HSE will augment the 2023 Grant funding by 7.5% on 2019 levels. This increase will be paid with the January 2023 allocation. The HSE will be in communication with the individual Co-ops in the coming days outlining what this additional grant funding will amount to in each individual case and this will be allocated on the



population base of the relevant out of hours service.

In addition, the HSE will provide funding to the current grant funded Co-ops to enable them roster additional doctors in out of Hours Treatment Centres between the hours of 6pm and 10pm. This additional funding will enable more patients to receive in person consultations by Co-ops with the objective of reducing the number of referrals to ED as well as the number of patients presenting directly to EDs without having been first seen by the relevant GP Out of Hours service. The additional rostered doctors can be locums engaged by the Co-ops or existing GP Co- op members. This exceptional measure will commence on 26th December, 2022 and will operate to the 28th February 2023 (inclusive) with a target of securing 100 additional GPs into the roster during this limited period.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all GPs and their practice staff for their continued support and hard work during 2022 in meeting the perennial challenges that face our healthcare system. I would like to wish you and your practice staff a happy Christmas and all the very best for 2023.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Healy'.

Pat Healy
National Director
Clinical Programme Implementation &
Professional Development

