



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Príomhoifigeach ECSP Ceantar 8
Baile Átha Cliath & Lár Laighin
Oifig an Cheantair
Bóthar an Ardáin
An Tulach Mhór
Co Uíbh Fhailí

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29th May, 2019

Deputy Thomas Byrne
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

RE PQ 21566/19: To ask the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting list for speech therapy in County Meath from three years.

Dear Deputy Byrne,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question and Representation, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and outline the position as follows.

The Meath Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Department provide services for residents of Meath, of any age, who present with speech, language and communication needs. This service is provided for the population of Meath, approximately 195, 000 people at 2016 census, with 30 WTE approved Speech and Language Therapists. Taking into account maternity leaves and vacancies as at today's date we are operating with an actual staffing complement of 24WTE.

It would be important to note that the current wait time for Meath SLT is not three years. As at the 30 April 2019 the longest waiter had waited 104 weeks. We are working hard to reduce this wait time with current actions as below:

- 1 WTE Staff Grade SLT approved for Meath under Progressing Disabilities Services. Recruitment is at paperwork stage but we would envisage once in post this SLT will have a significant impact on wait times. Each staff grade SLT in our Disabilities Service (where all long waiters currently sit) carries a caseload of approximately 85 children. We currently have 151 children waiting over 52 weeks therefore this new post is expected to considerably reduce wait times.
- Adaptations to service model in order to ensure evidence based practice and best use of resources.


Current examples include but are not limited to the below:

- Drop In Clinics; open to any person in the community who has a concern re: speech, language, communication needs who may wish to speak to an SLT. They can attend a drop in clinic, receive reassurance or referral if appropriate. A high proportion do not seek referral once reassured by SLT, reduced referrals in turn reduce wait times.
- Waitlist Talks; once children are referred to services parents can attend a talk. This talk outlines normal speech, language, communication development. There is a 'drop off' rate of up to 20% in some areas; once parents are reassured their child's development is following accepted norms they often decline further SLT, reducing wait times for those who do require it.

We do not wish to have people waiting 104 weeks for our services and are working on an ongoing basis to reduce this wait time. Recruitment to baseline staffing would be the main factor we would see positively impacting our waiting times.

I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Pat Bennett
Chief Officer
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation