



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte

Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'

Baile Átha Cliath 8

Office of the National Director of Human Resources

Health Service Executive

Dr. Steevens' Hospital

Dublin 8

Tel: 01 6352319 Email: nationalhr@hse.ie

Sorca Clarke, T.D.

11th February, 2021

PQ4907/21 To ask the Minister for Health the additional mental health supports available to front-line health workers given they are now in the midst of the greatest pressures they have faced since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and while exhausted continue to persevere, despite high levels of stress and anxiety, to protect the public and keep the health service from collapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Sorca Clarke

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your recent parliamentary question above which was sent to the HSE for reply.

The Employee Assistance Programme is the primary HSE service delivering psychological support to health service staff. The Employee Assistance Programme is part of The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit (WHWU), a division of National HR. The WHWU has core responsibility for the implementation of employee safety, health and well-being governance, policies, standards and interventions, and takes a lead role of behalf of the organisation in supporting the safety, health and wellbeing of HSE healthcare workers. There is a formal reporting structure through which feedback is provided to the organisation on emerging trends and themes impacting the health and wellbeing of staff.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is a free, confidential and independent service for all HSE staff. The service, which keeps the highest standard of confidentiality, is open to all HSE staff who can self-refer to the programme at any time, and do not need permission or approval.

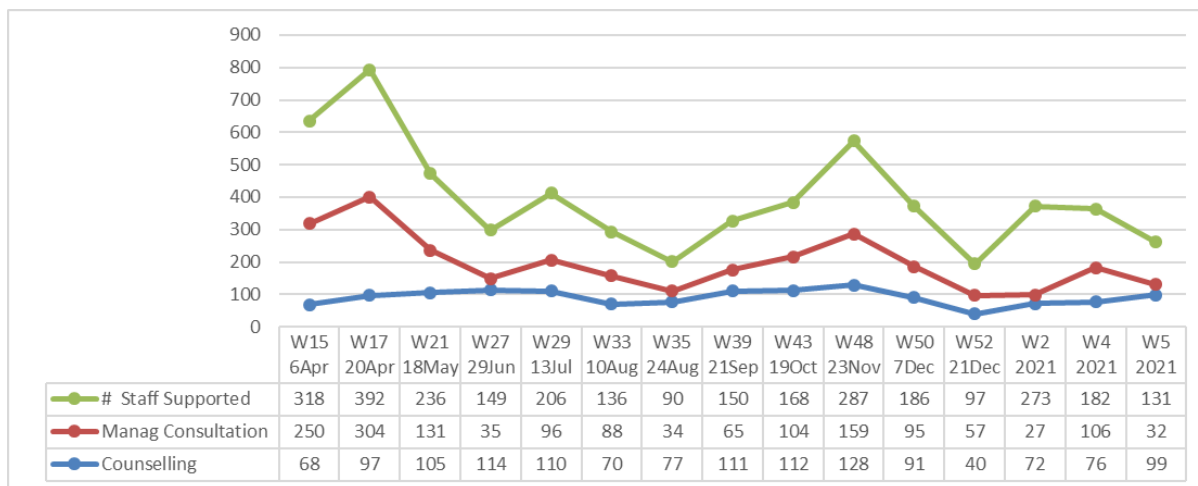
Given the context of the current climate and challenges faced by HSE staff over the last nine months, and recognising the importance of the need for staff to be aware of this support; normalising accessing the service; and encouraging HSE staff to seek support the EAP service has engaged in an EAPandME awareness raising campaign over recent months to help staff combat feelings of helplessness and overwhelm. HSE staff can access EAP via a single national number from anywhere in the country.

The suite of services provided by EAP includes:

- Counselling
- Consultation to managers on staff wellbeing and psychosocial issues
- Critical Incident Stress Management (C.I.S.M.) Response - individual and group support and pre-incident training
- Workshops on staff wellbeing issues

EAP National Team weekly data collection process was implemented starting on the 6th of April 2020. Data from April 2020 up to first week in February 2021 reveals that:

- 7,926 staff were supported by EAP counsellors,
- 4,067 counselling sessions were provided, and
- the EAP service delivered 4,123 manager consultation and psychosocial support calls.



Graph: Reported National EAP Team Weekly activity

A newly appointed external service provider also offers staff enhanced access to a 24/7 counselling support and online support platform. The support hub provides 24/7 instant access to a wide range of EAP resources, including information and guidance on wellbeing topics as well as signposting staff to support and intervention through online self-assessment.

As well as the above, psychological supports have been available to all health service staff throughout the pandemic. Individualised, needs based direct psychological supports have been primarily provided by the HSE Employee Assistance Programme including; counselling sessions; consultation for managers on staff wellbeing issues; critical incident response; brief psychosocial support; guidance for managers supporting their staff's mental health; and bereavement support on the death of a colleague due to Covid-19.

Information, posters and infographics, and leaflets for HSE staff and line managers provided by WHWU (available on the HSE website) include guidance and messaging on:

- Self-care
- Managing fatigue during Covid-19
- Managing sleep during Covid-19
- Building positive and supportive relationships among healthcare workers during Covid-19
- Minding your Mental Health for HSE staff
- Managing Stress
- The unit has also had direct engagement through local networks of HR managers, Occupational Health, service managers, ADONs/ DONs, etc. with regard to Healthcare Workers Affected by Death in Service of a Colleague due to COVID-19
- Working directly with HSE services reducing healthcare worker exposure to WRS
- Interventions to identify where change has had a negative impact on teams
- Team-based approaches to support team wellness and team self-care
- Collaborative work with wider HR and HSE services to address and respond to complex workplace psychosocial risks.

Occupational Health services are providing specialised medical advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19 and management of healthcare workers provide expertise to Management and Healthcare Workers on Covid-19 infection.

Health and Safety advice and information is provided to healthcare workers on matters such as social distancing at work, travelling for work, returning to work, and working from home. Among the many aspects of these services, is the Healthcare Worker Covid-19 Helpline which provides advice and support to healthcare workers from across the wider health family. To date, the COVID -19 helpline has provided occupational health support to over 26,733 healthcare workers.

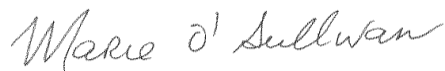
Organisational Health supports for HSE managers are available including guidance on building good manager/employee relationships, good practice guidance for healthcare staff in managing fatigue and sleep, stress management, and self-care.

In addition to the above, the National Psychosocial Response framework for Covid-19 is providing an integrated framework of psychosocial supports using a layered care approach to ensure Health Care Workers will receive the type of stress, or trauma, support they need, when they need it. This ranges from preventive measures like brief psychological first aid and peer support, to higher level supports like EAP counselling for HSE staff, or referral into other specialist mental health services. HSE staff have ready access to therapy through the EAP counselling service, including to trauma therapies.

Each local CHO area offers a number of key supports including a Psychological First Aid Call Back Service- for health care workers and some targeted groups of the public, who may be feeling stressed or anxious about the impact of COVID-19. Trained psychosocial responders will provide a brief telephone contact to help callers to cope with the daily challenges at this time.

The responders aim is to listen, to acknowledge people's challenges and help people get back on track. The responder will also recommend resources and signpost callers to additional supports if required.

Yours sincerely,



Marie O'Sullivan
National HR