

Please Note: *Due to FORSA industrial action, all responses to political questions and representations were unable to issue from the HSE until such time as the 'work to rule' ceased. FORSA industrial action has now been lifted and the HSE has commenced issuing replies to questions, including the backlog of questions. We thank you for your patience and understanding during this time.*

1st March 2024

Deputy Pearse Doherty
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ ref 55811/23

“To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to detail exactly what measures have been taken by his Department to deal with the CDNT crisis in Donegal; what plans are in place to deal with said crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Doherty

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth for response.

Having examined the matter, the following outlines the position.

Disability Services are experiencing significant challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of staff in all Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) in the Community Healthcare area covering Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo (CH CDLMS). In Donegal the East Donegal and Inishowen CDNT is particularly impacted by the recruitment and retention difficulties. The CDNT recruitment and retention difficulties in this Community Healthcare area are replicated across the country.

The Children's Disability Network Manager (CDNM) and senior HSE management are actively engaging with the Human Resources department to fill all vacant posts in HSE led CDNTs. CDNTs are given priority in terms of recruitment campaigns and bespoke campaigns for the area and have ongoing active recruitment processes and initiatives in place to fill vacancies within the CDNTs. This includes rolling recruitment campaigns to facilitate a continuous intake of applications for therapy posts. The CDNMs are meeting weekly with HR whose staff are prioritising the CDNT recruitment campaigns. Recruitment to CDNTs is also receiving priority attention nationally due to the workforce challenges in this sector.

Senior management and therapists from Donegal Primary Care and Children's Disability Services are engaged ongoing in relation to Children's Disability Services being supported by Primary Care



Services in Co. Donegal, and in particular the CDNT Donegal East & Inishowen. It must be acknowledged though that Primary Care Services are also challenged by recruitment and retention challenges in the relevant disciplines such as Speech & Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Psychology.

CH CDLMS also established a bursary scheme in 2023, which will see 23 students in Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Dietetics programmes in Letterkenny Atlantic Technological University supported to complete their professional degree programme in a UK based college. Of the 23 bursaries awarded, it is planned that at least 12 of these will be assigned to posts in Disability Services within CH CDLMS. The first of the students to whom bursaries have been awarded will graduate in June 2024. CH CDLMS has committed to funding this bursary scheme for three years to try to attract suitably qualified Health & Social Care Professionals to the area.

By way of additional support to Donegal CDNTs, there is a process in place with the specialist seating service that is ongoing and children from CDNT caseloads with specialised seating requirements are seen by the specialist seating service and equipment is signed off by the Primary Care Occupational Therapy Manager.

There was also a decision made to prioritise all children on CDNT caseloads with Priority 1 needs and some of the caseload was shared amongst the CDNT services across Co. Donegal. Cross CDNT team support is being provided in the form of Physiotherapists from the CDNT Donegal South West undertaking physiotherapy clinics for children in the Donegal East area, including referrals for ankle/foot orthoses and screening referrals. Home visits have been carried out in the Donegal East area by the South West team to review equipment. In addition, an external private physiotherapist was contracted to the Donegal East & Inishowen team in November 2023. Some 55 children under CDNT Donegal East & Inishowen have been offered physiotherapy reviews and the private physiotherapist has carried out home visits to review equipment and develop intervention plans. A physiotherapy development clinic is also in place.

The Occupational Therapist from CDNT Donegal North is also providing support to the Donegal East caseload. Cross-cover will also be provided by the newly-appointed Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edel Quinn', written in a cursive style.

Edel Quinn
Head of Service Disability CH CDLMS
Ceann na Seirbhíse Míchumas
Eagraíocht Chúram Sláinte Limistéar CDLMS