



Ceann Seirbhíse, Cúraim Príomhúil
Cúram Sláinte Pobail Cabhán Dún na nGall
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13th February, 2024

Deputy Niamh Smith
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ –ref 52227/23

To ask the Minister for Health if the national school dental service has ceased in Counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smyth,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Representation, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position for Community Healthcare Cavan Monaghan.

The HSE Dental Services has traditionally operated as a targeted, school-linked service, whereby children in specific primary school classes are targeted for an oral health assessment and for primary care treatment arising there from. Children are eligible for oral health care up to the eve of their 16th birthday. The provision of this service is a statutory requirement for the HSE but the number of children and cohorts examined are dependent on the available resources at any given time. Children who are examined in sixth class are referred to the HSE Orthodontic Service if eligible for publicly funded orthodontic treatment. Whilst at present this school dental service has not ceased it is severely curtailed.

As of last year only children in 6th class were being targeted for oral health assessments and in Monaghan to date only 50% of 6th class 2022/2023 (current 1st years) have been offered appointments.

The reasons for this reduction in service to children attending primary schools are as follows:

HSE Dental Services also provide care for;

- Adults with special needs
- Children with Special Needs
- Emergency treatment for medical card holders unable to access DTSS contracted dentists
- Ukrainian patients
- Patients under International Protection

Due to staff retirements, maternity leaves (currently there are 3 Dental Surgeons on maternity leave) and the paucity of Dentists available nationally, the HSE Dental Services in Cavan Monaghan have operated with a significant shortfall of WTEs for several years. This has resulted in an inevitable delay in progress through target classes, resulting in a significant unmet treatment need and therefore an increase in children presenting as emergencies.

Anecdotally we know that post Covid tooth decay in children has reached significant levels particularly in vulnerable groups, with any recent gains expected to be undone by ongoing access problems and disruption to public health programmes.



The demand for treatment by special care patients and parents of children with special care needs continues to grow and access is again limited by a lack of Dental Surgeons. Dental infection is one of the leading causes internationally of paediatric admission to hospital and due to lack of routine dental services the unmet treatment need increase the chance of hospital admission for acute dental infection for children and special care patients.

In addition, the demand for emergency care by adult patients has continued to increase rapidly as the majority of medical card patients are not able to access care under the public system due to the exodus of private Dentists from the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). A large influx of Ukrainian patients and patients under international protection, many of whom have complex treatment needs are presenting as emergencies and this care is being provided at HSE Dental Clinics. Due to the need for interpreter facilities and in order to meet the differing cultural expectations these appointments take significantly more time and incur additional costs.

Contingency plans have been put in place with dental staff routinely redeployed across the two counties and provide cross cover for emergency services to patients. Significant support has been provided to the service by Senior Management for recruitment campaigns that have resulted in new panels for Senior Dental Surgeons (2 vacant approved posts) General Dental Surgeons (3 vacant approved posts) and Senior Dental Nurses (2 vacant approved posts).

Historically it has been very difficult to recruit Dental Surgeons nationally but we now have experienced candidates, eager to work in the HSE in Cavan Monaghan. However the HSE recruitment pause means that it is currently not possible to hire these dentists and as there is a shortage nationally it is most likely these candidates will seek employment in the private sector and their skills lost to the public dental service.

Kindly note this response was held due to Fórsa Industrial Action which has now been lifted.

I trust that this is of assistance, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you require anything further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mandy Doyle".

Mandy Doyle
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