



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Cúnta Náisiúnta  
Clár Cúraim Pobail Feabhsaithe &  
Conarthaí Príomhchúraim  
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte

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**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice,  
Dáil Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Dublin 2.**

**14<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**PQ 17445/24**

**To ask the Minister for Health if he will confirm that approximately 15 retired GPs over the age of 72 unhesitatingly responded to the pleas of the HSE to remain in their posts, given the critical shortage of family doctors in rural areas**

Dear Minister for Health,

I refer to the above PQ 17445/24 received in our office for response.

I wish to confirm that as at the 8th of May 2024, there are 10 GPs who are currently over the age of 72 years and retain GMS Contracts on a Temporary basis, at the request of the HSE.

The HSE is working to overcome known GP availability capacity and workforce challenges across the country. GMS vacancies are advertised in advance of known retirements/resignation and every effort is made to fill GMS vacancies. All GMS vacancies are advertised by open competition and if unsuccessful, vacancies are re-advertised. In the event that the advertisement process is unsuccessful following a number of attempts, alternative options are explored until a successful outcome is achieved. Locum GP cover is maintained in the interim in the vast majority of cases while in a small number of cases, the retiring GP is requested to remain in practice, on a temporary basis, until the vacancy is filled or until an alternative option is finalised.

The HSE is committed to continuing to engage with the relevant GP stakeholders in ensuring the sustainability of General Practice, and in addressing workforce challenges in this critically important part of the health service through supporting GP practices particularly in rural communities and practices in socially disadvantaged communities and through a multi-annual investment programme in conjunction with the Irish College of General Practitioners aimed at substantially increasing the number of GP training places.

The 2023 GP Agreement provides for a number of targeted initiatives which includes financial support measures for GPs in rural areas as well as areas of urban deprivation, where the filling of vacancies have proved challenging. One of the measures includes pilot initiatives whereby qualifying GMS GP practices, where a vacancy has arisen due to retirement/resignation/death of the outgoing single-handed GP, may form an affiliation with a larger practice involving two or more GPs within the nearest population centre.

In addition, the 2023 GP Agreement also provides for increased supports to GPs to maintain and increase capacity in general practices. This includes enhanced Practice Support Subsidies and introduction of a new form of Practice Grant towards the cost of employing additional practice staff and/or increase in hours of existing practice staff, together with the introduction of a new role of GP Practice Assistant. The 2023 Agreement also makes provision for additional supports for GMS GP practices in rural communities in sourcing locum cover.

The HSE is working closely with the Irish College of general Practitioners on a range of measures to expand the GP Workforce and in developing a sustainable model of General Practice for the

future in line with Sláintecare. GP Training Places have increased from an intake of 259 in 2022 to 286 in 2023 with a further increase to 350 in 2024.

The International Medical Graduates (IMG) Programme, is an initiative supported by the ICGP, HSE and the IMO aimed at expanding GP workforce in rural and urban disadvantaged areas. A total of 121 candidates were successfully recruited to the scheme in 2023, 75 of which had commenced in general practice at year end. To date, (April, 2024), 141 candidates have been offered places with 100 working in General Practice. Recruitment is ongoing with the aim of recruiting 250 doctors in 2024. This initiative is targeted at rural areas, areas of urban deprivation and difficult to fill vacancies which have arisen in various geographical across the country.

It must also be noted that the Strategic Review of General Practice, which is currently in progress, will examine and identify the necessary contractual and structural arrangements that need to be in place to facilitate a system of GP care in line with Slaintecare. This will involve the further identification of challenges facing general practice and will focus on identifying practical solutions to those challenges. Specific elements being considered under the review include GP Capacity, as well as GP Training, Funding Model and Modernised Contractual Arrangements, GP Out of Hours Services and Ehealth.

I trust this is of assistance.

**Yours sincerely,**



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**Geraldine Crowley,  
Assistant National Director,  
Enhanced Community Care Programme &  
Primary Care Contracts.**

