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7th August 2024

Deputy Duncan Smith TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re PQ 32867 24: *To ask the Minister for Health the amount spent on agency staff in 2023 and then 2024 to date across the health service, broken down by staffing type and to whom the payments were made; the breakdown for the amount spent on nursing agency staff to date in 2024; his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy Smith,

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 Health for response. Your PQ above has been referred to me for response.

Context

In line with the immediate requirement from Government and the HSE Board to ensure that the appropriate control mechanisms are in place to ensure that the overall financial planned horizon for 2024 and 2025 is achieved, I&E expenditure limits have been implemented system wide, effective from Monday 15/07/24. In overall terms, the funding sought and largely agreed for 2025 assumes these spend limits and related savings are fully delivered.

While operating within the spend limits, the HSE Senior Leadership Team have committed to fully deliver on the planned activity levels as set out in the NSP 2024 including the Waiting List Action Plan and Urgent and Emergency Care Plan. This requires the dual approach of improving the productivity of our key services and managing the level and affordability of our workforce through the application of both the HSE's Pay and Non-Pay control limits for 2024. This is particularly focused around staffing levels, including getting to levels of agency and overtime which is sustainable into 2025.

Each part of the organisation, including the six HSE Health Regions, National Services and Schemes and the HSE Centre have a clear WTE allocation. Each area will be provided with its own specified number of WTEs and have within that approved WTE and related total pay spend limit.

The WTE allocation is also accompanied by a spend limit on agency and overtime as part of an overall pay spend limit. This will allow each area to be responsive within the overall funding and WTE allocation available to them.



Response

Please see **Appendix 1 Table 1** below which shows the HSE spend on agency staff by staff category, which includes agency Nursing staff, for the year 2023 and for the period January to May 2024 which is the most recent data available. The breakdown is by the Department of Health staff categories i.e. Medical/Dental, Nursing, Management/Admin, Paramedical, Support Services and Maintenance/Technical staff. The data was sourced from the HSE Consolidated Financial Intelligence system and is for HSE Statutory services only. Please note that the figures for 2024 are draft only and are subject to change. This data is not available by provider from the CFI system. The shortcomings in the HSE legacy financial systems are well acknowledged and their replacement by a single standard financial system for the Health Sector is at the core of the Finance Reform programme initiated by the Department of Health.

The available supply in the labour market for health workforce continues to be a challenge. This is not unique to Ireland, but rather a global health workforce challenge. Recruitment and retention of Clinical, Nursing and other key staff is a constant challenge and impacts adversely on the ability to maintain safe and effective services. Therefore, as part of the HSE's overarching resourcing approach whereby direct employment does not meet the needs of service delivery requirements, agency staff are utilised. This can be for a variety of reasons, including sick absence replacement both long and short term, to replace vacancies currently being actively recruited to, to replace maternity leave etc. There are also additional resourcing requirements with the replacement of lost hours in critical services areas following the reversal of the Haddington Road Agreement.

In advance of the filling of these hours via direct employees, there is a need to prioritise critical services for replacement through agency and overtime. Collectively, these give rise to the utilisation of agency resources however while simultaneously running large scale domestic and international recruitment campaigns to fill through direct employment. At times the HSE have been unable to fill a vacancy even via agency. The agencies have indicated that they are experiencing difficulty in recruiting themselves due to a lack of availability and also accommodation availability and costs.

The majority of agency spend is salary and statutory pay costs such as PRSI, holiday allowance etc. In line with the Protection of Employees (Part -Time Work) Act agency staff have the right to the same basic employment conditions, this includes basic pay, shift premiums, unsocial hours and Sunday rates.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at sarah.anderson1@hse.ie or tel: 087 9423319.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Anderson

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Appendix 1 to PQ 32867 24

Table 1

HSE Agency Staff costs by Staff Category for 2023 and for the period January to May 2024		
<i>HSE Statutory Services Only</i>		
Staff Category	2023 €m	*YTD May 2024 €m
Management/Administration	86.3	35.4
Medical/Dental	135.7	69.4
Nursing	146.2	63.1
Paramedical	38.1	16.0
Support Services	234.3	99.6
Maintenance/Technical	6.7	4.9
Total	647.3	288.5
<i>Source : HSE Consolidated Financial Intelligence System (CFI)</i>		
<i>*Note : Please note these are the latest figures currently available</i>		
<i>2024 figures are draft only and are subject to change</i>		