



Oifig an Stiúrtóra Náisiúnta Cúnta
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,
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Deputy Francis Noel Duffy
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

27th August 2024

PQ Number: 27109/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health his views on the shortcomings of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service whereby children with behavioural issues who have reduced school attendance that are referred to CAHMS are returned as not in their remit; if consideration has been given to a locally based layered system of support for families under pressure that shows up as behavioural dysfunction that is all too often medicated and if he will make a statement on the matter. (Details Supplied: This is all too often the case in deprived urban areas where the opportunities for social disruption are too readily available) Francis Noel Duffy

Dear Deputy Duffy,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

HSE Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide specialist mental health services to those aged up to 18 years, who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorder that require the input of multi-disciplinary mental health teams.

HSE CAMHS Operational Guidelines 2019

The CAMHS Operational Guidelines (2019), sets out the criteria for the types of referrals suitable for CAMHS and the types of referrals not suitable for CAMHS. Children or adolescents referred to community CAMHS must fulfil the following criteria:

- The child or adolescent is under 18 years old
- Consent for the referral has been obtained from the parent(s)
- The child or adolescent presents with a suspected moderate to severe mental disorder
- Comprehensive treatment at primary care level has been unsuccessful or was not appropriate in the first instance



Types of Referrals Suitable for CAMHS

Mental disorders are often described on a continuum of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. A number of factors are taken into account when defining whether someone has a moderate to severe mental disorder and these include the diagnosis, formulation, the duration of the symptoms and level of functioning in daily living. In practice the term moderate to severe means that the mental disorder is severe enough to cause substantial distress to the child or their family or others. The child or adolescent would have a significant impairment in functioning in various aspects of their life including development, family relationships, school, peers, self-care and play or leisure activities.

The list below gives some guidance on what constitutes a moderate to severe mental disorder. However, it is important to note that not all children or young people will fit neatly into a diagnostic category:

- Moderate to severe Anxiety disorders
- Moderate to severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder/ Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD/ADD)
- Moderate to severe Depression
- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Psychosis
- Moderate to severe Eating Disorder
- Suicidal ideation in the context of a mental disorder

Types of Referrals Not Suitable for CAMHS

CAMHS is not suitable for children or adolescents whose difficulties primarily are related to learning problems, social problems, behavioral problems or mild mental health problems.

There are many services available to respond to these needs for children and adolescents, e.g. HSE Primary Care Services, HSE Disability Services, Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, Jigsaw, National Educational Psychology Services (NEPS) and local Family Resource Centres.

CAMHS does not accept referrals for children or adolescents where there is no evidence of a moderate to severe mental disorder present:

- Those with an intellectual disability. Their diagnostic and support needs are best met in HSE Social Care/HSE Disability Services. However those children or adolescents with a mild intellectual disability with moderate to severe mental disorder are appropriate to be seen by CAMHS.
- Those with a moderate to severe intellectual disability and moderate to severe mental disorder. Their needs are best met by CAMHS Mental Health Intellectual Disability (MHID) teams, if present. In the absence of CAMHS MHID teams, multi-disciplinary assessment, intervention and support is provided by the Children's Disability Network Teams in HSE Disability Services.
- Those whose presentation is a developmental disorder. Examples of these could include Dyslexia or Developmental Coordination Disorder. Their needs are best met in HSE Primary Care services and/or Children's Disability Network Teams.
- Those who require assessments or interventions that relate to educational needs. Their needs are best met in services such as Children's Disability Network Teams or the National



Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) or by services such as Tusla's Education Welfare Service provided by Tusla. Those who present with child protection or welfare issues where there is no moderate to severe mental disorder present. Their needs are best met by Tusla – The Child and Family Agency.

- Those who have a diagnosis of Autism. Their needs are best met in services such as HSE Primary Care and/or Children's Disability Network Teams. Where the child or adolescent presents with a moderate to severe mental disorder and autism, it is the role of CAMHS to provide appropriate multi-disciplinary mental health assessment and treatment for the mental disorder. This may involve joint working or shared care with other agencies including HSE Primary Care, Children's Disability Network Teams, and other agencies supporting children and adolescents.

Further detail on the CAMHS Operational Guideline can be found here:

<https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/ncr/camhs-operational-guideline-2019.pdf>

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Hennessy".

Sarah Hennessy
General Manager
Child and Youth Mental Health Services