



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta  
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,  
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Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

**PQ Number: 10225/24**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health his views on the long waiting lists for dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) in Ireland as it is reported there is a minimum of 18 months wait for people who live with mental health issues. -Pa Daly**

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Dear Deputy Daly

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.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is an evidence-based intervention for individuals with severe difficulties with emotion and behaviour regulation. Individuals who avail of DBT often present with suicidal and/or self-harm behaviour. They may have been given a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder or Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder within secondary care mental health services. Many randomised controlled trials have repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of DBT, both from a client outcome perspective as well as from a service utilisation perspective.

In 2013, the National DBT Project Ireland (NDBTPI) was established to coordinate DBT training and implementation at a national level. This coordinated approach was established as a result of multiple independent requests to the public health service for funding to attend DBT training events (Flynn et al., 2018). The aims of the project were twofold: to implement DBT in Community Mental Health Services across Ireland and to evaluate this coordinated implementation of DBT at a national level. A comprehensive research evaluation was conducted on the implementation and effectiveness of the DBT programmes established as part of the coordinated implementation. The findings of the research study have been published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and reports. The key publications from the National DBT Project are summarised in the National DBT Project (2013 -2018) report and listed in Appendix A. Between 2013 and 2017, 23 DBT teams were established. In line with A Vision for Change recommendations, these DBT teams were established in community mental health teams (CMHT) across the country, with multidisciplinary clinicians from multiple sector teams in a geographical area being seconded from their core teams to deliver DBT approximately 1.5 days per week. DBT training was provided by a licensed training provider, a U.K. based company, British Isles DBT Training, which could train a maximum of 45 therapists nationwide annually.



**CHO1**

Cavan Monaghan Mental Health Service: There is no DBT service available in the Cavan area within Cavan Monaghan Mental Health service. People from Cavan that require this service may be offered DBT in Monaghan; this is decided based on a clinical assessment of need and the acceptability of the patient. Six people were recently placed on the Monaghan DBT waiting list – five of these from Monaghan and one from Cavan. It is estimated that staff will be in a position to deliver the DBT Programme within the coming eight to ten weeks. In general, the waiting list for DBT in Monaghan is not long; however, as the staff who deliver DBT are part of the community mental health team, the wait time may vary, depending on availability of staff. Also, as group work is a core element of DBT, a minimum number of patients are required for each DBT Programme hence some patients may have to wait until the optimal number have been referred and have agreed to participate.

Sligo Leitrim Mental Health Service: The Sligo Leitrim Adult DBT Service is a part time service, operating two days per week, and is staffed by professionals who all have other roles in the wider mental health service. Clients who attend the DBT Service are usually in treatment for a period of 15-18 months, and so the turnover of new cases can be slow. The current practice for Sligo/Leitrim DBT service is to contact the teams that refer to us (Community Mental Health Teams, Rehabilitation and Recovery, Psychiatry of Later Life and MHID) on a rotational basis as therapists become available, and invite the team to prioritise a case they would like to refer to the DBT Service. This means that we no longer operate a waiting list, and also means that usually the clients who are most in need for the service obtain quicker access.

Donegal Mental Health Service: There are a limited number of DBT places available within DMHS. This is a year-long therapy. As they become available these places are allocated to those patients meeting the inclusion criteria. There are no waiting lists. There is also a separate program called a DBT skills group, which is a shorter program, which is offered to people who might not meet all the criteria for DBT but do for the DBT skills group. There is no waiting list for this.

**CHO2**

DBT Team Service Area	Does Service keep waiting lists for DBT?	If so- how long are people waiting?	If so- how many people are on it?
Mayo Mental Health Services	No		
Roscommon Mental Health Services	No		
Galway East Mental Health Services	Yes	12-18 months	12
Galway West Health Services	Yes	6-18 months, depending on the team	Information not available.
MHID Services Galway	No		
CAMHS Services	No		



### **CHO3**

Mental Health Services in the Mid West do not hold a waiting list for DBT. A DBT service has commenced in Co Clare and access is based on priority of need. DBT training continues in Limerick and the service will commence when the necessary staff are fully trained. Access will be based on priority of need.

### **CHO4**

#### **Cork County Team**

The Cork County Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Team covers the North Cork and West Cork Mental Health Service areas. Because of the geographical distribution of these regions, DBT therapists transport DBT clients from the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) with which they are affiliated through their primary role (e.g., Psychologist). The Cork County DBT Team operates without a waiting list. It offers places to respective CMHTs when the DBT therapist connected to that CMHT has a place(s) available. The CMHTs do not hold waiting lists for DBT, but that they identify clients for DBT as places become available.

#### **North Lee Adult Team**

As of January 2023 the North Lee team offer places to each sector team on a rotational basis (across the 5 North Lee sector teams- Macroom/Blarney, City North East, City North West, Cobh/Glanmire, Midleton/Youghal). There are currently 29 individuals on the waiting list. Anticipating waiting times is challenging, as availability of places is dependent on the engagement of individuals higher on the list.

As soon as the waiting list for a sector has been cleared, we invite that sector team to nominate a service user from their sector for the next available place on DBT. Sectors may keep their own lists/notes of those who they wish to nominate (should they choose to do so), to enable them to effectively prioritise when places become available. For our DBT skills, only Programme we have cleared our waiting lists and offer places to each of the five sectors on a rotational basis.

#### **South Lee Adult Team**

The South Lee Adult DBT team do not maintain a waitlist but when spaces become available, they contact CMHTs to prioritise individuals they deem most in need. There are seven different Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) who can send referrals to the DBT Programme in South Lee.

#### **North Kerry Adult Team**

The newly established North Kerry (NK) team, which commenced in February 2024 will not be operating a wait list but will work to capacity. When there is capacity to take on a client the team will notify referrers.

This team covers Dingle, Tralee, Castleisland and Listowel. Previously the North Kerry wait time was upwards of 12 months. Should our new team remain resourced at its present level it will have a capacity of upwards of 12 clients in full DBT and possibly a skills only group.

#### **South Kerry Adult Team**

The South Kerry/Killarney team functions as one consultation group. As they are divided across two CMHTs and hold two separate groups, they currently maintain two distinct waitlists for each sector.



### **South Kerry CMHT**

On the South Kerry CMHT the longest wait following referral is currently at fourteen months. There are currently eight people on this wait list with one DBT therapist delivering 1:1.

### **Killarney CMHT**

Currently the longest wait time following referral is six months. Skills only referrals would usually access a skills group within three months across both CMHTs.

### **North Cork CAMHS**

Does not operate a waiting list. Referrals are opened in advance of planned groups.

### **West Cork/South Lee CAMHS**

Does not maintain a waitlist. Referrals are generated 6-8 weeks before the group's start date. The area covers West Cork and South Lee 3 teams and the intention is to conduct the group on a yearly basis.

### **North Lee CAMHS**

We do not keep a waiting list for North Lee East/West. We open up referrals in advance of planned groups.

Our joint team covers just the NLE and NLW catchment areas.

### **Kerry CAMHS**

A newly formed team, The team does not maintain a waiting list. Coverage extends to South and North Kerry CAMHS. The plan is to hold the group annually, with recruitment of participants beginning two months prior to the starting date.

### **CH05**

Currently there is 1 DBT Team in SECH, based in Waterford that offers service to 3 Community Mental Health Teams. Current staffing consists of 2 Psychologists & 1 Staff Nurse. We currently have 10 people waiting for Full Programme DBT in Waterford. The person who is longest on the waiting list has a June 2023 referral date.

### **CH06**

There is no DBT services in Adult services but we do offer DBT in CAMHS which currently has no waiting list.

### **CH07**

Dublin South Central Adult Psychology Service which covers the Inchicore, Drimnagh, Rathfarnham, Churchtown, Ballyboden, Terenure and Rathmines, The Liberties, Kilmainham, Rialto, Dolphins Barn and parts of Harold's Cross areas. The service in this area offers Dialectical Behaviour Therapy DBT's full programme with a DBT skills group. DBT is one of a number of therapeutic programmes offered within the service.



The James's sector runs an ongoing programme that recurs every 8 weeks. Structured clinical management is another evidence based intervention for people with complex needs and has equal outcomes to DBT. This is delivered through the Multi-Disciplinary Team.

#### **Tallaght Adult Psychology Service .**

The service in this area offers a DBT skills group that is open to clients who attend the Tallaght and Ballyfermot Mental Health service and also a \*UP group\* for clients who attend the Crumlin service. Consideration was made recently in Crumlin and Clondalkin about setting up a similar care pathway for their services. It was agreed that this would be revisited in the near future. \*The Unified Protocol (UP) is a transdiagnostic treatment programme for emotional disorders developed to help people who are struggling with intense emotions. This treatment programme is applicable to all anxiety and unipolar depressive disorders and potentially other disorders with strong emotional components. The strategies included in this treatment are largely based on common principles found in existing empirically supported psychological treatments.\*

**Kildare** - Kildare operates a rolling program with a rolling intake and does not hold data on a waiting list. A Community Mental Health Team will be informed of an upcoming space on the program, and clients identified when spaces occurs.

**Linn Dara CAMHS** - offer the DBT Multi Skills Family program. This is a 22 week program consisting of Skills teaching and one to one therapy and supervision (Consult) and consists of 4 hours of clinical time per week. We do not hold a waitlist for this program. DBT is one of a range of evidence based interventions that are offered to families and young people who present to CAMHS for management of Suicidal behaviour. Non Pharmacological Therapeutic interventions range from psycho-education to families, skills teaching and more intensive psychotherapy.

The provision of any of the therapeutic programmes can be impacted in light of current recruitment challenges being experienced within the HSE. This will be carefully monitored through the appropriate governance structures in place in mental health services in CHO7.

#### **CHO8**

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) services are well established in Longford Westmeath Mental Health Services with teams operating in Athlone, Mullingar and Longford. There are no waiting lists as treating Consultants hold clinical responsibility until vacancies arise in the programme. DBT treatment programme can take up to eighteen months to complete and vacancies are allocated in consultation with treating Consultants based on clinical presentation and assessed need. Places on the DBT programme are offered to clients based on their individual clinical and personal circumstances. Currently there are no clients waiting to access the programme in any of the three aforementioned areas. Currently there are no DBT services established in Laois Offaly Mental Health Services. This issue has been discussed and we hope to address this in the near future. Louth Meath Mental Health services do not operate a wait list system for DBT. When a space becomes available.

#### **CHO9**

Community Healthcare Organisation Dublin Mental Health services have not been funded for a dedicated dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) Team. However, there are a number of clinicians who have completed the National Clinical programme DBT training. Service users can be offered DBT interventions if needed when referred for individual Psychological intervention.



Some service users are provided with a 13-week DBT skills program, which is typically offered annually across most community mental health teams (CMHT). They may receive the Decider Skills Intervention if they attend the Day Hospitals. We continue to actively seek interest from staff to access further levels of training within the National DBT Programme.

DBT is one potential approach to supporting people therapeutically. There are many other therapeutic approaches that have also been demonstrated to be effective in a similar manner. Within our Mental Health Services, decisions about the therapeutic approach offered to people results from a number of considerations, including the individual needs of patients, and considerations about maximising the effectiveness of our service.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Mc Cusker', written in a cursive style.

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**Tony Mc Cusker**  
**General Manager**  
**National Mental Health Services**