



National Lead for Palliative Care
Access & Integration
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Deputy Gary Gannon
Dail Eireann
Leinster House,
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27th January 2025

Re PQ No 1003/25: To ask the Minister for Health the measures that are in place to provide compassionate and expedited support for terminally ill patients and their families, particularly in cases where the patient is unable to attend local offices due to their medical condition.

Dear Deputy Gannon,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you above referenced parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health.

In Ireland, specialist palliative care services are delivered by the HSE in partnership with voluntary agencies to provide integrated, high quality and accessible palliative care to patients and their families. Specialist palliative care is provided by multidisciplinary teams in acute hospitals, specialist Palliative care inpatient units (Hospices) and in patients own homes by community specialist palliative care teams. In essence specialist palliative care is configured to support patients and their families in whatever location or setting that is most appropriate for the patient. While the community specialist palliative care teams mainly see patients and families in their own homes, they do in reach into residential service for older persons, prisons and homeless accommodation to ensure equal access to all to specialist palliative care.

There are currently 14 specialist palliative care inpatient units (Level 3 Hospices) providing a total of 276 beds across the country. In 2024 there were 4,711 admissions to specialist palliative care inpatient units. This represents a 42% increase in comparison to 2020 (3,309). Timely access is a priority and in 2024, 97% of patients were admitted within 7 days of referral. Many patients admitted to specialist palliative care inpatient units are discharged to the community for further follow up from the community specialist palliative care teams.

There are 32 specialist palliative care community (home care) teams covering all 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. The specialist palliative care community teams work in close partnership with GP's and primary care teams to provide expert palliative care to both adults and children. In 2024 community palliative care teams provided care to an average of 4,259 patients each month in their own homes. This is almost a 30% increase from 2020 and reflects both the increased demand for palliative care services in the community as well as the services response to meet this growing need.

In partnership with the Irish Cancer Society and Irish Hospice Foundation, the HSE also funds Night Nursing care to patients and families receiving end of life care. Night Nursing provides expert care in the final nights of a patient's life in their own home. It is a valuable support in providing respite to carers and supporting patients who wish to die in their own home. In 2024, approximately 2,800 patients received Night Nursing care in their own homes utilising an average of three nights of care per patient.

Early access to specialist palliative care has significant benefits to patients and is often delivered in tandem with curative treatments. Over the past ten years there has been a positive trend of patients with life limiting conditions being referred to specialist palliative care earlier in their course of illness. In line with the National Adult Palliative Care Policy 2024 many services are leading innovations and developments to meet the needs of this patient cohort. This include palliative care outpatient clinics

along with rehabilitative palliative care services which have focus on enhancing the quality of life and maintaining function for a person with a life limiting illness.

Children with palliative care needs also receive care in the community via a shared care approach involving GPs, Paediatricians, community Specialist Palliative Care Teams and Clinical Nurse Coordinators working collaboratively to care for the child and the family in the home setting. The Voluntary sector including LauraLynn Children's Hospice, Irish Cancer Society and Jack and Jill Foundation support the statutory services with additional in-home nursing and respite supports for families.

In essence specialist palliative care in Ireland is configured to provide palliative care to patients from their initial diagnosis with a life limiting condition up until their death, as well as providing bereavement support to patient's families. This has necessitated the development of a range of services to meet patients' needs and central to this is the provision of care in a patient's own home/residence by community specialist palliative care teams.

I trust this is in order and answers your query.



Maurice Dillon
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