



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Minister Simon Harris
Department of Health
Block 1
Miesian Plaza
50 -58 Baggott Street
D02 XW14

18th May 2020

Re. The concerns of Social Workers in relation to the unmet needs of those dying and bereaved during Covid-19

Dear Minister Harris,

I write to seek a meeting with you to express our deep concerns about the continued unmet needs of the dying, bereaved families and surviving residents in nursing home and residential care settings (see link to press release <https://iasw.ie/page/561>), and to propose how this situation could be addressed. Social workers are the largest group of professionals providing frontline end of life and bereavement support in our hospitals, hospices and communities. From the outset of the pandemic, the IASW has highlighted the inequity in access to this essential care across all services, particularly for people in nursing home and residential care settings.

In response to the Covid_19, social work has developed a model of care in five public nursing home units which provides a co-ordinated approach to communication with and support of the dying and bereaved. The model reflects what is internationally accepted as best practice in frontline bereavement support. Feedback from bereaved families and staff have been very positive and research suggests this social support will promote resilience and mitigate future grief. With use of redeployment/use of returning social workers through Ireland on Call, this model can be staffed for the most part through existing resources, with appropriate governance structures put in place.

The IASW is advocating that this model is rolled out on a national basis to ensure that all dying people and their families in public and private facilities have equal access to high quality care around their end of life and bereavement needs.

Sixty per cent of Covid_19 deaths have now occurred in nursing home and residential care settings. Many people have died alone without the comfort and care of their families, in settings with no clear pathway for end of life or bereavement support. Families and surviving residents require bereavement support. Previous lessons from Irish health care scandals show the importance of timely, accurate and sensitive communication and support.

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We have a national opportunity now to learn from these lessons and support our most vulnerable. The harrowing accounts of families of the deceased in Dealgan Nursing Home, highlighting the devastating impact of poor communication, clearly demonstrates the need to act. Action must be urgent, given the high number of deaths which have occurred to date.

The IASW would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and share our expertise to inform a national response. For further information please call our office on 086 0241055. We look forward to hearing your response.

Kind Regards,

Áine McGuirk

Chair (SW 004099)

cc. Ms. Kathleen Maclellan, HSE Assistant Secretary, Social Care Division
cc. Dr Philip Crowley, HSE National Director, Quality Improvement
cc. Dr. Tony Holohan, HSE Chief Medical Officer, Dept of Health
cc. Mr. Seán Moynihan, CEO ALONE Ireland

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