

20.11.02

14 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the vacancy amongst nurses. (OQ.315/2020)

Given the response to a Freedom of Information request revealed that, for the past year, the vacancy rate for nurses has been at, or over, 10 per cent, will the Minister advise what impact this has had on overtime rates and absentee rates arising from stress and what risk assessment, if any, has been undertaken to determine whether, and how, the vacancy rate has put pressure on the safety of service delivery?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

It is worth noting that across many healthcare organisations there are vacancy levels in excess of 10 per cent but this does not mean that the posts are unoccupied. The use of bank staff as a flexible workforce gives the department the capacity to fill those roles in response to need. The safety of patients is a very high priority for H.C.S. (Health and Community Services) and, therefore, there is a daily operational hub in place to ensure that healthcare is delivered safely. This is managed via the flexible use of the workforce in response to the need each day. Sickness and absence data was relatively stable during 2020 until July when H.C.S. saw a peak in absence of all staff groups. This peak was driven by an increase in lost hours for the reasons described as stress and anxiety and musculoskeletal. It is believed that this peak in lost hours was a post-COVID response with people needing time off to recover and is reflected in healthcare organisations across the U.K.

4.14.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister talked about bank nurses. Surely that means high overtime rates for bank nurses. Can he further inform Members how much more agency/locum employees cost than our own full-time?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Bank nurses are not paid overtime rates. I understand they are paid at a rate established as bank nurses.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

But they still do the hours though, surely?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Of course they do the hours. That is my point to the Deputy, that there is a bank of nurses who fill these vacancies, so that work is being done. Obviously if there is a vacancy the salary is not being paid but instead the remuneration is going to a bank nurse who is covering the position. In response to the very general question from the Deputy, which he is often asking, there is additional cost for agency staff but this is not a question about agency staff. It is a question about absentee rates and I have answered it by saying that this is covered by bank staff.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Given that answer, I shall be asking again.