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Ms Kirsty Scott & Mr Barry Murray
#123GP Campaign
Participation and the Practice of
Rights (PPR)

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Dear Ms Scott & Mr Murray

Thank you for your presentation the HSCB on 13 December 2018 and your letter dated 20 December 2018. I look forward to your presentation at Stormont Long Gallery on 30 January 2019.

In respect of the specific questions in your letter I can advise the following:

- 1. Why has the uptake of funding for in-house counselling provision by GP practices decreased in the past year and how does it intend to address this?**

The expenditure for this service* in 2017/18 increased over the previous year by 4%. Since 2014/2015 expenditure has increased by 36%.

- 2. Why are there significant disparities across Trusts in the uptake of the funding for in-house counselling and how does the Board intend to address this?**

Across Northern Ireland the uptake of this service is 69% (2017/2018) however there are variances in the uptake of it across HSC Trust areas. This service is available to all GP practices in Northern Ireland and GPs, as independent contractors, choose whether to enter into a contract with the HSCB to provide it to their patients. It is a Practice's choice whether to enter into a contract and the HSCB cannot compel a practice to contract to provide it. HSCB colleagues do meet regularly with NIGPC representatives to discuss and review enhanced services

*Northern Ireland Local Enhanced Service entitled "Provision of practice based counsellors for patients with mild to moderate depression".

and how we can improve them and encourage GP practices to contract for services where uptake is lower than in other areas.

3. How does the Board intend to address the unacceptable waiting times for accessing counselling via the Hubs?

Primary Care Hubs are partnerships between HSC Trusts, GPs and Community and Voluntary organisations to coordinate timely access to talking therapies (largely provided by Community and Voluntary organisations) for the treatment of mild to moderate common mental health problems. The role of the HSC Trusts is to employ the coordinator to support the partnership, triage referrals, and liaise with providers to access the most appropriate service in a timely manner.

Waiting times for referrals to statutory services through the hubs is monitored in line with Ministerial Targets for Psychological Therapies or Mental Health services as appropriate.

4. Is there a target waiting time for accessing counselling through the Hubs and how is the Board monitoring Trusts' compliance with any such target?

The counselling services provided by Community and Voluntary Hub Partners are funded through a number of sources. Where they are in receipt of Health and Social Care funding their performance against waiting times will be monitored through their contract monitoring arrangements. However, as these are not statutory mental health services Ministerial access targets do not apply and HSCB does not monitor access times for community and voluntary organisations outside of individual contracting arrangements.

5. Will the Board commit to at least doubling funding for in-house counselling as a first step to addressing gaps in provision?

HSCB will seek funding from DoH for additional services as required. However demand for increased funding from GP practices to provide in-house counselling is not indicated at present.

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HSCB will continue to seek additional funding for Hub Partners providing NICE recommended therapies for the treatment of common mental health problems in line with demand for these services.

The Department of Health have made available Transformation resources to take forward the implementation of multi-disciplinary teams across Down Federation/SE Trust and Derry Federation/Western Trust. The multi-disciplinary team will include the introduction of mental health practitioners, working across all practices within these initial areas.

6. How will the Board monitor and evaluate the use of this funding to ensure quality provision of counselling?

The Mild to Moderate Depression enhanced service is delivered by GP practices who contract to provide the service against a service specification. They are required to provide returns to the HSCB in respect of the service delivered and the HSCB monitors and evaluates the enhanced service against the service specification and the GP practice returns.

If you require any further assistance please contact, in the first instance, Nicola Henderson: email nicola.henderson@hscni.net or telephone 028 95363282.

Yours sincerely



Dr Ian Clements
Chair, HSCB

CC: Marie Roulston, HSCB
Dr Sloan Harper, HSCB
Mark Lee, DoH

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