

Press Release

Minister for Health launches Palliative Care Week and urges people to have conversations about their care

8 September 2019 (Embargoed to 12noon, Sunday 8 September 2019)

Minister for Health Simon Harris TD has today (Sunday 8 September) launched Palliative Care Week aimed at encouraging more people to learn about palliative care.

The number of people aged over 65 is set to increase by almost 80 per cent over the next 20 years and Ireland has the most rapidly rising need for palliative care in Europe.

Palliative Care Week is coordinated by the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC), across the island of Ireland.

AIHPC Director Karen Charnley said she hoped Palliative Care Week will encourage people to learn more about palliative care.

Palliative care focuses on helping a person, of any age, with any life-limiting illness, to achieve the best quality of life. It involves the management of pain and other symptoms and provides support for social, emotional and spiritual needs, and can be provided at home, in a nursing home, hospital or hospice.

Ms Charnley said: "In the Republic of Ireland, the number of people over 65 is projected to increase by almost 80% from 673,400 in 2018 to almost 1.2 million by 2038. Advances in public health, medicine and technology mean that people are living for many more years today than previous generations and this is something to be celebrated.

"As populations age, the pattern of diseases that people live with and die from changes. As well as being for people with advanced cancer, palliative care is also for people living with advanced heart or lung disease, kidney failure and other conditions such as motor neurone disease or dementia.

"Although the number of people over 65 is a key factor in determining the needs of palliative care services in populations, many people well below the age of 65, including from birth, will require palliative care due to their life-limiting illness or condition.

"Palliative Care Week aims to raise awareness of the difference palliative care can make to people with a life-limiting illness or condition, to carers and to families throughout the island of Ireland. This year's theme 'Palliative Care: Surrounding You With Support', is focusing on how people with palliative care needs are being supported in the community. As we create conversations around palliative care, particularly involving people with direct experience, we hope more people will feel empowered to think about how palliative care could help them."

Paul FitzPatrick from Coolock is supported by St Francis Hospice in Raheny. In January 2018, he was diagnosed with a life-changing condition: a lung disease called Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF). Before he became ill, he was working full-time as a truck driver and living an active life which included plenty of trips to the park with his six grandchildren.

Speaking at the launch of Palliative Care Week 2019, Paul said: “After the first couple of sessions I could feel my breathing getting better and I could start to do the simple things in life, like going up the stairs or going to the shops which I found very hard to manage before. From being down in the hospice and the treatment I’ve got down there, and the love and care and kindness has helped me progress through this and from this time last year I’m out and about which I thought I’d never be able to do again.”

Speaking ahead of Palliative Care Week, Minister Harris said: “Palliative Care Week provides an opportunity to highlight the positive impact that palliative care can have in improving quality of life for people diagnosed with a life-limiting or life-threatening illness. I would like to thank those who are sharing their stories with us during this Week.”

On palliative care provision in Ireland, Minister Harris said “We in Ireland can be proud of our position as a leading nation in the provision of palliative care. The Department of Health and the HSE remain committed to ensuring that Ireland’s palliative care system is fit for purpose, and offers targeted care to patients who avail of these services.”

Sheilagh Reaper-Reynolds, HSE Planning Lead for Palliative Care, said: “Palliative care services are vitally important for people living with a progressive illness that may limit or shorten their lives, and also for the people who care for them. The purpose of Palliative Care Week is to help us explain how much palliative services can improve a person’s quality of life throughout the course of their illness. The focus for 2019 is on how people with palliative care needs are being supported right across our health services including primary care, hospices, hospitals and nursing homes. This support also stretches beyond formal health and social care services to include the many volunteers and support organisations working in the wider community.”

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Notes to Editors:

- Karen Charnley, AIHPC Director is available for comment and interview.
- A number people with palliative care needs and their families are willing to share their experience of palliative care with the media including Paul FitzPatrick. A video of Paul is available [here](#)
- Photographer Marc O’Sullivan has been commissioned to cover the launch of Palliative Care Week and will issue images to photo desks today for reproduction free-of-charge.

- For more information on Palliative Care Week visit <http://www.thepalliativehub.com/public-awareness> #PallCareWeek

Additional Information on Ireland's Ageing Population & Palliative Care Requirements

1. Well over 600,000 people in the Republic of Ireland are aged 65+ (673,400 people, 2018) and this is projected to increase by almost 80% (77.2%) (+ 522,600 people) to 1,196,000 by 2038.
2. Increases are particularly marked amongst those aged 85+: the number of people over the age of 85 is projected to increase to over 2.5 times the current figure (2018) by 2038.

(1 & 2. Department of Health, 2018. *Health in Ireland Key Trends, 2018.*)

3. The rate of population ageing in ROI is a good deal faster than the average for EU countries (while the population is still young in comparison to other European countries) - Department of Health, 2016. *Health in Ireland Key Trends, 2016*
4. The number of deaths in the Republic of Ireland (which is a good indicator of likely palliative care needs) is projected to rise to approximately 55,400 by 2050 representing a rise of some 78% from 2018 (Eurostat online database of baseline projections - Eurostat online database: Demographic balances and indicators by type of projection [proj_18ndbi]. Baseline projections. Last update: 03.07.19)
5. All of this means that Ireland appears to have the most rapidly rising need for palliative care in Europe (Kane et al. 2015) - Kane, P. M., Daveson, B. A., Ryan, K., McQuillan, R., Higginson, I. J., & Murtagh, F. E. (2015). "The need for palliative care in Ireland: a population-based estimate of palliative care using routine mortality data, inclusive of non-malignant conditions". *Journal of pain and symptom management, 49(4)*, 726-733.

About All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care

All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC) is a collaborative of hospices, health and social care organisations and universities on the island of Ireland. AIHPC advances education, research and practice to improve the palliative care experience of people with life limiting conditions and their families. <http://aiihpc.org/about>

This is the sixth annual Palliative Care Week coordinated by AIHPC. AIHPC works with a group of visionary partners who recognise the value of working together to achieve a better, richer experience of palliative care for people with life limiting conditions. The organisation's 25 partners are across the island of Ireland. More information about AIHPC is available here: <https://aiihpc.org/>

