

Dignity4Patients Annual Report Highlights Ongoing Sexual Abuse of Patients

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In 2019 Dignity4Patients, the organisation supporting people who suffer sexual abuse or inappropriate sexual behaviour whilst a patient in the health services, helped 217 of its 323 active clients and their families through its support, advocacy and information services. Court accompaniment services were also provided to 57 persons in this client group.

On the publication today (12th October 2020) of its 2019 annual report, executive director of Dignity4Patients Bernadette Sullivan stated, “Once again in 2019 Dignity4Patients facilitated patient victims in reporting sexual abuse and accessing support services. Dignity4Patients supported seven new clients who came forward with historical allegations of abuse and who met HSE funding criteria for support.

“An additional nine callers to our service were referred to other organisations. Dignity4Patients does not know if they followed through on their referrals as some expressed reluctance to do so.

“2019 also reinforced our concerns about the current risk of sexual abuse of patients in our health service. We have ongoing grave concerns for patient safety. There is a worry that risks to patients may increase due to the pressures on the health services in this pandemic and Covid 19 patient management requirements.

“The geographical spread of complainants shows that sexual abuse of patients is a national issue. We need an examination of all cases reported to the HSE and Dignity4Patients in order to establish the scale and to identify areas and situations where patients are vulnerable so that effective prevention measures can be put in place.

“We need a clear message from the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice that there is zero tolerance of sexual abuse of patients. This should be followed by the implementation of effective prevention measures together with

an education and awareness campaign for healthcare staff and the general public.

“In addition, Dignity4Patients needs to be adequately resourced to provide a necessary first point of contact for all patient victims that gives them access to specialised services. From our experience and feedback from clients, we know that sexual abuse of patients in healthcare settings needs specialised knowledge of patient treatment and examinations and knowledge of health services and of the particular vulnerability of patients.”

A copy of the annual report, which was launched by the Minister for Justice Ms Helen McEntee, is available on the Dignity4Patients website dignity4patients.org

Ends

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