

Michael Shine's victims still fighting for justice as their abuser walks free

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As convicted paedophile Michael Shine is released from prison this week, his victims of sexual assault say they are still suffering a life sentence from his actions, and delays in compensation are making matters even more difficult.

The former surgeon walks free from Midland Prison this week, after being jailed for four years in 2019 for indecently assaulting seven boys during medical examinations at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, and at two private clinics in the town on dates between 1971 and 1992.

The 89-year-old from Wellington Road in Dublin 4 has never admitted the offences and will not be subject to post-release supervision.

Dignity 4 Patients, the support group which takes care of many of his victims, says the delay in civil settlements is causing additional hurt and anguish, while victims themselves say there is still no closure for them despite his incarceration.

"I think it is very unfair that Shine is been released at this time, and over 100 of us are still in limbo as to what the final outcome for us will be," one of his victims told the Drogheda Independent. "Personally, I am looking for Justice since 2012, that's 10 years of torture, and Shine gets to go back to his big house in Dublin; the justice system in this country needs to be amended where paedophiles are concerned."

CEO of Dignity 4 Patients Adrienne Reilly says their thoughts are with the people they have supported for decades and are once again calling for a public inquiry into sexual abuse in health care settings.

"Our thoughts on his release are very much with the victims and survivors and their families. Michael Shine has served sentences for convictions relating to several awful sexual assaults involving a number of victims. While the sentence served has given limited solace to some, others are still waiting for some form of justice through civil proceedings," said Ms Reilly.

"Victims and survivors we support are suffering over 50 years later. Still waiting for an apology. Still waiting for some kind of acknowledgement to the despicable harms they have suffered, many as children."

In light of this, 101 Dignity4Patients victims and survivors are calling on the government to intervene and explain why the HSE and Medical Missionary of Mary's (MMM) ongoing row over costs is delaying payment of damages to them.

An indemnity fund was set up in 1997, estimated to be in the region of €4.9m, through the sale of the hospital by the MMM to the North Eastern Health Board and monies were set aside specifically for claims regarding sexual abuse.

However, a battle surrounding legal costs between the HSE and the MMMs has thrown any compensation payments into doubt.

"Victims and survivors were led to believe that the Medical Missionaries of Mary had agreed to a settlement deal with their legal teams prior to Christmas 2021. Essentially the HSE and MMM in their row over costs has had the direct result of derailing the settlement process for victims and survivors and forcing the progression of civil litigation cases before a jury," adds Ms Reilly. "If this is allowed to happen, this could take some time for the first case to come on, and years more for the rest. The HSE and the MMM row has nothing to do with victims and survivors. Some survivors have already died. Time marches on and many survivors are facing serious health challenges as they age."

Another alleged victim of the former doctor says compensation might go some way toward ending ‘the further torment of victims by the non-agreement for payment’.

“There is no closure for me as my civil case is yet to come before the courts,” he said.

At the time of sentencing in 2019, Judge Martin Nolan described the offending by the disgraced doctor as a “serious pattern of misbehaviour”.

More than 110 civil cases have been settled, with some 112 further cases also before the court.

“This is alarming and causing further unnecessary trauma upset and harm,” adds Ms Reilly. “While any settlement will not make them whole again, it will serve to acknowledge what has happened to them, give them the respect they deserve and allow them to move on in some respects.”

She says as a group they are renewing their call on government, on behalf of all victims and survivors, to establish a public inquiry into the sexual abuse of patients in the Irish health service.

They are also calling on the government to identify and adequately support and care for patient/victims of sexual offences suffered within the Irish health service.

“We have received no increase in funding for 2022 despite an increase in people coming forward to avail of the services that Dignity4Patients provides, for ongoing civil and criminal casework. Dignity4Patients continues to work in a client centred, confidential and highly professional manner supporting victims of sexual abuse in health care settings.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this article, you can contact Dignity4Patients, whose helpline is open Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm.