



College of Psychiatrists Response to HSE Report on South Kerry CAMHS

- **Recruitment and retention crisis in mental health a significant factor in mistreatment of young mental health patients in South Kerry CAMHS**
- **College acknowledges distress for families involved and for those waiting on care; outlines specific questions families should ask mental health services to ensure best care**

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland has said that the inappropriate prescription of multiple medications to young mental health patients at South Kerry Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is a highly disturbing and distressing case which demands accountability.

It has also cautioned that the broader recruitment and retention crisis in mental health at present is a significant contributing factor in the case.

It has stated that cases such as this highlight the importance of adequate resourcing and the availability of necessary skills and training, multi-disciplinary teams, clear governance arrangements, supervision and care planning.

Today (Wednesday), the HSE published an independent review of the treatment of approximately 1,300 young people who attended South Kerry CAMHS between July 2016 and April 2021. While the authors of the report found no extreme or catastrophic harm was caused to the patients in these files, hundreds of children received “risky” treatment from a doctor working in mental health in South Kerry and significant harm was caused to 46 of them.

Speaking today, **Dr William Flannery, Consultant Psychiatrist and President of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland**, said: *“This case is highly disturbing, will be a cause of huge distress for families involved and personal responsibility is of course paramount here. However, the specifics of this case cannot be separated from the broader recruitment and retention crisis in our mental health services at present, which is having a significant negative effect on patients.”*

“Not only does the absence of full multidisciplinary team members affect support and care for children and their families, but an absence of consultants can lead to difficulty to adhere to governance, professional standards and inherent routine reviews which are all necessary for the safe delivery of care, especially when the service is under-resourced, under-staffed and under pressure.”

He said that it was imperative that suitably qualified psychiatrists were available to care for patients who needed them, and that it was highly regrettable that this was not the case in South Kerry CAMHS.

“Psychiatrists, as medical doctors, are specialists in the treatment, support and knowledge of mental illness and disorders as well as the broad spectrum of mental health challenges. The specialism requires competence and knowledge of internationally evidenced based treatments and supports that are psychological, social as well as pharmacological. CAMHS and all specialist areas of mental health services require that specialist qualification of psychiatrists and their allied health professionals to provide the best possible support and service to families.”

Dr Flannery added that trust was paramount in any setting of the health service.

“There are, undoubtedly, lessons to be learned from this report and it will be necessary to rebuild public confidence and trust in services again. That trust is built and maintained on standards of best care and practice delivered by appropriately trained and experienced health professionals on the ground as well as governance, protocols and sufficient operational resources being made available.”

The College urges families and guardians who obtain an appointment for CAMHS to ask the following questions to ensure the best possible care:

1. Is there a specialist psychiatrist registered on the Child and Adolescent specialist register of the Medical Council on the team?
2. Will other multidisciplinary team members be available to provide treatment as clinically indicated?
3. Is there an allocated key worker on the team for the child or young person and if so, what are their contact details, including availability?
4. Will the parents /guardians be involved in the child’s / young person’s care?
5. Does the child or young person have a care plan and can a copy be provided to the parents/guardians?
6. What other supports and service may be needed?

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is the professional and training body for psychiatrists in Ireland and represents 1,000 professional psychiatrists (both specialists and trainees) across the country. The College advocates for the highest standards required for our mental health services. Children and adults in Irish society deserve no less.

Issued on behalf of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland by Gordon MRM

Julian Fleming

Ph: 087 6915147

julian@gordonmrm.ie