

Ireland lagging in treatment of children with Type 1

The treatment of children with Type 1 diabetes in Ireland is “very far from where it should be”, a leading consultant has warned.

According to Paediatric Endocrinologist at Cork University Hospital (CUH), Dr Colin Hawkes, a co-ordinated national child diabetes strategy is needed if the care of affected children is to be improved.

Dr Hawkes and his team at CUH treat almost 500 children with Type 1 diabetes, however, a lack of resources means it is not possible to see children every three months as recommended. Some children are being left waiting up to eight months between appointments.

“In CUH alone, we have an exceptional team, but we should have six diabetes nurses for the number of children we care for and we only have three. We have submitted a business case requesting three more. It is extremely difficult to provide the care these children deserve at such low staffing levels.

“We are also totally unequipped to address the psychological burden of this disease,” Dr Hawkes explained.

Cork is currently the largest centre in Ireland without a dedicated psychologist to support affected families

Type 1 diabetes is caused by the body's

own immune system destroying the insulin-making cells (beta cells) of the pancreas. When a child is diagnosed, they must learn to detect glucose levels and administer insulin throughout the day and night.

“It is extremely important to get it right. This is critical in childhood, where we are setting the child on a lifelong journey in managing this condition.

“The aspiration should be that every child should have access to the same and the best standard of care, regardless of where they live. However, there is not equity in Ireland in relation to access to a full diabetes multidisciplinary team,” Dr Hawkes said.

He noted that some children face long journeys to be treated.

“CUH is a regional centre of excellence for children with Type 1 diabetes in the South/Southwest Hospital Group. In addition to our local children, we provide diabetes expertise for children in Kerry and as far as Clonmel in Tipperary.

“Rather than bringing children long distances to us, appropriate staffing of the diabetes programme at Cork would allow our diabetes team to perform regional outreach clinics. In my view, that should be the model,” Dr Hawkes said.

He emphasised that the burden this



Dr Colin Hawkes

condition places on children “is huge”, with rates of depression as high as 20% among this young population.

Furthermore, it can also become a “disease of the family”, impacting everyone involved and leading to a higher rate of anxiety, depression and divorce among parents of children with the condition.

“Family stress and burnout is common as the condition has to integrate into every aspect of the child's life, including school, sleepovers and sporting/leisure activities. A strong diabetes team can support families in navigating the challenges that each of these events brings,” Dr Hawkes added.

Direct debit winners

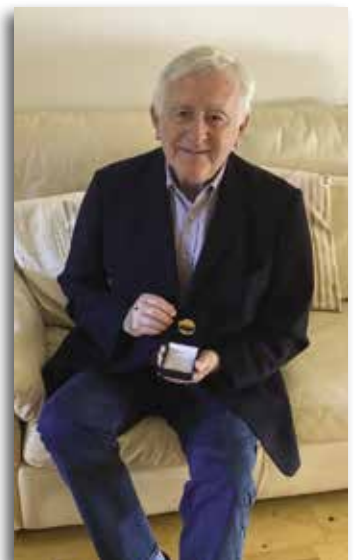
- September: Julia Murphy, Cork
- October: Tomas Keane, Limerick
- November: Sean McNelis, Co Meath



Recent 50-year medal recipients



Pictured here are recent 50-year medal recipients Dan O'Donnell from Dublin (left) and Liam Morrissey, also from Dublin (right)



All with diabetes should avail of free flu vaccine

All people with diabetes are being urged to avail of the flu vaccine, which is free of charge to everyone with the condition.

According to Diabetes Ireland, those with diabetes are six times more likely to be hospitalised with flu than those without the condition.

The charity recently carried out a survey to find out people's attitudes to the flu vaccine. Encouragingly, of the 876 people surveyed, 95% said they intend to get it or have got it already this year.

However, 21% were not aware that it is free of charge to people with diabetes and worryingly, just 44% have been recommended the vaccine by their healthcare professional.

The charity said it is concerned that the reason why more than half of respondents have not been recommended the

vaccine by their healthcare professionals may be linked with the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that many have not seen their diabetes specialists or GPs for a long time.

Thousands of people with diabetes are still on waiting lists for their diabetes appointments and as a result, the message may not be getting through.

Flu vaccine can protect you from unnecessary complications and hospitalisations and the risk of both is increased for people with diabetes. The charity would like to raise awareness of the need for a flu vaccine this season and let people with diabetes know that they can avail of it free of charge in pharmacies and general practice.

"We hope that this message will reach those who have not heard about it from

their healthcare teams," explained Dr Kate Gajewska, Research and Advocacy Manager at Diabetes Ireland.

Just 5% of survey respondents said that they do not intend to get the flu vaccine this year. Reasons for this included a lack of awareness that they were in a 'higher risk' group and concerns over a potential bad reaction. Some said they felt they were young and fit enough not to need it, while others thought that masks would protect them from getting flu.

More information on the flu vaccine is available on the HSE website or from your GP, pharmacist or diabetes team.



Deficiencies in UHL diabetes services criticised

Deficiencies in services for people with Type 1 diabetes at University Hospital Limerick (UHL) were recently raised during Leaders' Questions in the Dáil. Addressing Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Independent TD, Michael Lowry, said that he had been contacted by numerous people across Tipperary regarding their concerns about diabetes services in the mid-west.

He noted that Ireland still has no diabetes register and highlighted the importance of early intervention and specialised medical support structures for those affected. He said that education on how to manage the condition is key. However, in UHL, services for adults with the condition have been criticised.

"In UHL, the needs of paediatric Type 1 patients are being met by a specialist dietitian. There is no specialist dietitian in the hospital to meet the needs of long-term or newly diagnosed adults with Type 1 diabetes. If they are hospitalised, they can receive dietary advice and support from a ward dietitian, but it is not diabetes-specific.

"Furthermore, there is no specialist

care or outpatient appointments for adults with diabetes in UHL. This is not the quality of service you expect from a centre of excellence," Mr Lowry said.

He also described it as "discriminatory and disgraceful" that UHL does not provide insulin pumps. He said that these devices are "efficient and effective and give the patient a release from regular injections".

Meanwhile, Mr Lowry pointed out that in December 2020, UHL received confirmation of funding to recruit three additional dietetic posts for the treatment of adult diabetes, however, "these posts are still not filled".

"The HSE in a typical bureaucratic flourish tell us that the recruitment process for two of these posts is at an 'advanced stage', while the process for the third remains ongoing. This is cold comfort to patients, as dietitians' involvement is crucial for insulin pump therapy education."

He emphasised that staff at UHL are "providing exemplary care to patients under immense pressure", but they need

more support, as do those with diabetes.

"Adult patients need and deserve access to dietary services and the provision of insulin pumps from UHL. They are living with a life-altering condition and need access to the services and supports they are entitled to get in keeping with patients attending different hospitals.

"Patients from Tipperary, Clare and Limerick are being forced to seek private medical care to access the services that UHL is not providing. Tánaiste, what happens to those who cannot afford to avail of a private service?" Mr Lowry asked.

Responding, Mr Varadkar said that he understands the frustration and anger that people must feel when they cannot access treatments available in other areas.

He said that from a government perspective, funding has been allocated to UHL to hire the specialist staff that are needed. He pointed out that there is a shortage of specialist staff worldwide, which has also impacted UHL, but he encouraged "anyone in the HSE and UHL involved in the recruitment process to expedite this process".

Increasing political awareness of diabetes

One of Diabetes Ireland's aims in 2021 was to raise awareness of diabetes among TDs and Senators and this was achieved through our work with the Cross-Parliamentary Group on Diabetes.

Chaired by Fianna Fail TD, Cormac Devlin, the aim of this group is to increase political awareness about the scale and severity of diabetes and its impact on society, with the goal of increasing Ireland's traditionally poor investment in supports for people living with the condition.

It achieves this by; providing a platform for elected Irish representatives to discuss diabetes-related issues; liaising with those affected by the condition; giving a voice to diabetes experts and organisations; seeking government funding to promote best practice.

A number of meetings were held during the year to highlight various issues. These included a meeting in September on the need for diabetes service development. Consultant Endocrinologist and HSE Clinical Lead of the Diabetes National Clinical Programme, Prof Sean Dinneen,

spoke about a range of issues, from the need for a National Diabetes Registry to the many challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, including the impact of staff redeployment on service delivery.

Prof Dinneen also updated the meeting on the enhanced community care programme, the focus of which is to move care out of hospitals into the community. He reported that 11 hospitals would be supporting 15 ambulatory hubs in various communities around the country and that each hub would host a specialist diabetes team in the community.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the Cross-Parliamentary Group in November focused on paediatric diabetes services. Consultant Paediatric Endocrinologist and HSE Paediatric Diabetes Clinical Lead, Dr Nuala Murphy, presented on the many issues faced by paediatric diabetes teams nationwide and the significant costs associated with poor care.

She spoke about the vision for Irish paediatric diabetes services, which include patient-centred, high-quality

care, a standardised approach for early diagnosis and clear pathways and equitable access in line with agreed models of care.

Dr Murphy noted that while significant investments have been made in some centres, major gaps remain in others. These gaps are due to issues such as staffing, a lack of formal link-up between smaller centres and regional centres and the lack of a transition pathway between paediatric and adult services.

She also spoke about the importance of having a Unique Patient Identifier, adequate ICT infrastructure and a National Paediatric Diabetes Audit.

Dr Murphy also highlighted that 60% of the current budget that is spent on diabetes is used to treat diabetes-related complications that are preventable.

The Cross-Parliamentary Group on Diabetes is already looking forward to 2022. One major focus will be the need to ensure that the HSE's plans for community hubs are launched, as these will provide timely and vital supports to people with diabetes.

Activity-packed Diabetes Fun Day in Enniscorthy

A Diabetes Fun Day was held in Enniscorthy Sports Hub on October 9.

Activities included running, limbo dancing, shot putt, javelin, long jump, bingo and garden games.

Every child or teenager had to complete 10 activities to earn a hot meal from our catering vans. Ten more activities earned them an ice-cream.

The event was run by our Parents Support Group and sponsored by Browne Fire Protection. The Under-11s Shelmaliers GAA team also carried out a blitz to raise funds. They raised a very impressive €500 for the local diabetes paediatric unit.

People of all ages got involved in the activities and we wish to thank everyone who participated and everyone who helped out with the event.



Pictured left is the U-11s Shelmaliers GAA who carried out a blitz to raise funds



Lots of fun and activities were had at the Diabetes Fun Day in Enniscorthy