

Evening Echo

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Crystal meth must be kept out of Cork

HAVING extensively highlighted the very real issue of heroin abuse and its consequences in Cork, it is alarming now to report the appearance here of the deadly and highly addictive crystal meth. Gardaí had recently received information about the minor use in the city of the drug, infamously portrayed in the hit television series *Breaking Bad*.

Just like heroin, it is a killer but if it is possible to be even worse, this stuff is. On Friday, we reported that a man in his 20s had been treated in a Cork hospital after taking crystal meth. He was rushed to hospital after telling paramedics he had taken the horror drug with other substances.

Once heroin got a grip in Dublin, it wrecked life in communities there for many years. There is a danger it can do the same in Cork. The appearance of crystal meth makes that threat all the greater. Apart from the inevitable serious physical and psychological harm it generates in users, it can make them extremely violent and agitated.

While there have as yet been no local seizures of the drug, the fact that it has appeared here means we need a very high level of alert.

Chief Superintendent Michael Finn has appealed to anyone with information about this drug to make contact with Gardaí. It is imperative for our community that every possible measure be taken to keep this scourge out of Cork.

Bring on Marquee

AFTER the miserable weather which has blighted the start of our summer, we need a lift.

One event which has repeatedly proved it can brighten up our lives is Live At The Marquee.

It kicks off tonight with Cliff Richard and there's a stellar line-up of concerts right up to the brilliant Lana del Rey on July 15. Bring it on!

Press Council of Ireland



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By LIAM O'SULLIVAN

Executive Director, Care Alliance Ireland

IRELAND'S family carers are a key part of our community and the eighth National Carers Week, taking place from today until Sunday, gives expression to this.

Family carers are usually immediate relatives who provide very high levels of care, at home, for children and adults with severe disabilities, frail older people and people who are terminally ill.

Census 2011 estimates that there are in the region of 187,000 family carers in Ireland, and identifies more than 4,000 carers under the age of 15.

The 2012 National Carers' Strategy: The 2012 National Carers' Strategy encapsulates the Government's commitment to Irish carers, recognising them as 'partners in care.' While we welcome this laudable aim, much remains to be done to make the vision a reality.

The strategy, the first of its kind, commits to the following:

- Carers will be recognised and respected as key care partners. They will be supported to maintain their own health and well-being and to care with confidence.
- They will be empowered to participate as fully as possible in economic and social life.

The strategy identifies three guiding principles: Recognition, support and empowerment, and sets out high-level goals in relation to each.

While there are areas of weakness — noticeably there is no guarantee to fully protect current income supports, and no firm commitment to the right to carer assessments — it does set out a roadmap for better recognition of, and support for, family carers.

Importantly, it outlines which government department is responsible for implementing each action, and sets out definite time frames.

Almost two years after publication of the strategy, we remain underwhelmed by progress towards its implementation.

Our meeting tomorrow with Minister Kathleen Lynch, who has direct responsibility for its implementation, will be telling.

We will be insisting on meaningful engagement and progress towards making the commitments in the strategy a reality.

The contribution made by carers: We know that Ireland's family carers save the State a huge amount of money. They are the backbone of our health and social care service in relation to care for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Effects of cuts to services: A recent survey of carers of people with neurological conditions, undertaken in collaboration with the Neurological Alliance, does not paint a very positive picture.

The findings show that cuts to the respite grant, changes to medical card provision and other cutbacks are having a significant impact on these carers. In the survey of over 170 family carers, 82% reported being impacted by cuts to home care packages over the past three years; 77% by cuts to respite services and 70% by cuts to home help.

Over one-fifth of carers could not access any respite cover; 42% had given up work to look after the person with a neurological condition, while 64% reported a significant fall in family income since the onset of the condition.

Clearly, the past few years have not been easy for family carers. While restrictions on home care supports continue, the expectation remains that family carers will continue to provide complex levels of care.

We are working closely with other groups to protect the supports available for people with disabilities, since disability and family caring are two sides of the same coin.

Competitive tendering for home care ser-

Carers Week reminds us of our unsung heroes



Liam O'Sullivan says that family carers are essential to our social capital and, as such, deserve to be recognised, protected and fully respected as partners in care.

model will be for carers, we will seek to influence its development and implementation so that the support family carers receive will not be determined by the type of health insurance they choose.

Hope for the future: We are confident that things will improve. We are hopeful that the last of the cuts to income supports for carers is behind us, and that the roll-out of a new carer needs assessment tool will begin to give expression to the National Carers' Strategy vision of family carers as partners-in-care.

In addition, better resourcing of some primary care teams is yielding positive results.

Whilst we do know that caring can place immense strain on the carer, we also know that being a family carer can be enriching and rewarding. Either way, it is always a valuable role.

Our society does not fully recognise the immense contribution made by family carers.

National Carers Week plays a small part in keeping family carer issues on the political agenda and in the media, and in reminding us all of our unsung heroes.

Family carers are essential to our social capital and, as such, deserve to be recognised, protected and fully respected as partners in care.

● Carers Week is coordinated by Care Alliance Ireland, in partnership with nine other leading Irish organisations who support Family Carers: The Alzheimer Society, The Carers Association, The Irish Cancer Society, Caring for Carers Ireland, The Disability Federation of Ireland, Brí, MS Ireland, The Parkinson's Association and The Irish Hospice Foundation.

A list of events for National Carers Week is available at <http://www.carersweek.ie/> events.

vices: Many greet the move towards competitive tendering for home care with concern. Reductions in exchequer funding in recent years have forced the HSE to look for lower hourly rates from potential providers.

Quality service must include fair wages for home care workers, adequate support and supervision, access to training, paid travel time and some level of guaranteed hours.

A race to the bottom in care services is not in the interests of family carers or those they care for.

Fifteen minute house visits, as prescribed widely and increasingly controversially in the UK, have no place in quality home care. Many of the not-for-profit organisations currently providing home care supports await the results of the current tendering process with keen interest.

We will work to ensure full regulation of the sector, in the interests of protecting vulnerable home care clients.

While we are unsure as yet what the impact of the proposed Universal Health Insurance