Mobile Health Clinic Launches Providing Primary Healthcare to People who are Homeless and Street Workers

Partnership Project Aims to Bridge Gap for Marginalised Group

Today (10.05.11), the Mobile Health Clinic operated by Safetynet, Dublin Simon Community, Chrysalis and the Order of Malta Ireland was launched in the Mansion House. The service, a mobile vehicle converted into a clinic, aims to bring primary health care and harm reduction services to people who are homeless and female streetworkers while also providing GP trainees with experience of working with hard to reach groups.

The Mobile Health Clinic was piloted in April of last year and in the first eight months of operation provided medical care to 288 patients and operated 66 GP clinics. The most common presentations reported were addiction related problems (27%) and respiratory related illnesses (18%). The pilot phase was operated out of an ambulance prior to the recent introduction of the new 'made to measure' mobile clinic.

A spokesperson for the Mobile Clinic said "Our research has shown that mainstream primary care services were missing a certain cohort of people including those who were homeless and female sex workers. The demand on this service during the pilot phase alone highlights a huge gap in the provision of this care. The Mobile Clinic is seeking to address this."

Also speaking at the launch was Rosin Shortall TD, Minister for State for Primary Care. "This project shows how organisations can work together for the good of others and I commend the work of all involved in the Mobile Health Clinic partnership service and the Mobile Health Clinic Management Committee, comprising of the Safetynet Network, Chrysalis Community Drug Project, Dublin Simon Community and the Order of Malta, Ireland."

The Minister continued, "I would also like to acknowledge the immense contribution of the General Practitioner training schemes, the drivers, outreach workers, Registrars and the supervisory medical practitioners, without their support the service could not operate".

Speaking in relation to the trainee GPs, the Mobile Clinic Spokesperson said "This service provides vital training for trainee GPs who may have negative connotations in relation to working with this client group, often due to limited interactions in a pressurised environment such as Accident & Emergency. The reaction to date has been excellent from trainees who have participated in the Clinic."

Studies show that people who are homeless have mortality rates of 3 ½ to 4 times greater than the housed population and evidence in Ireland and the UK suggests the need for specialised services because homeless people underutilise mainstream primary health care services for various reasons including accessibility, attitudes and medical card difficulties.

The service is operated on Wednesday night by Chrysalis and on Thursday by Dublin Simon Community. It commences from Stephen's Green and then travels through the north and south city centre to areas where there is a need for services. A drop-in system is in operation and the clinic is manned by trainee GPs who are supervised by senior GPs, Chrysalis/Dublin Simon outreach workers

and emergency medical technicians from the Order of Malta Ireland. The GPs are from training schemes in Trinity College Dublin, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University College Dublin and North Dublin.

It is envisaged that the service will extend the number of nights it runs and in the coming weeks will be introducing a blood borne infection screening service, hepatitis B vaccination programme and cervical screening. The possibility of providing x-ray services for early detection of TB is also being explored.

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Note to Editor:

- **Safetynet** Provides primary healthcare services to people who are homeless in conjunction with homeless service providers.
- Dublin Simon Community provides services to people who are homeless or in fear of becoming so. These services range from outreach to emergency and supported accommodation, support to live independently and treatment services.
- **Chrysalis** offers range of services to people, living or working in the community, affected by drug use and provides services for female street workers.
- **Order of Malta, Ireland** coordinates and manages a range of voluntary community services including the provision of ambulance transport and community care services.