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HSE aims to bring in new weekend work rosters for healthcare staff over summer

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The [HSE](#) hopes to introduce new rostering arrangements over the summer that could require many healthcare staff to [work](#) at weekends for the first time, its chief executive has said.

[Bernard Gloster](#) said final management proposals for the introduction of rostering staff to work any five days in a week – known as 5/7 day working – was currently with trade unions.

In one of the biggest policy changes in years, the HSE has indicated it wants [up to 10 per cent of the workforce](#) to be available for rostered weekend work.

Under the reforms, the HSE is seeking more staff on duty at weekends to: facilitate discharges of patients; boost the numbers providing care in emergency departments; increase the capacity in delivering diagnostics; and establish new outpatient clinics on Saturdays in hospitals and or community primary care centres.

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It said that “for Sunday, it is patient flow that is the priority. Between Saturday and Sunday, we discharge about 11-14 per cent of overall discharges for the week. We are aiming to get this to between 17-20 per cent.”

HSE proposals given to trade unions said where a need for an extended service was identified, initially staff would be sought to work weekends on a voluntary basis. It said if there were not enough volunteers, “eligible staff would be identified to resource the extended hours of service”.

The HSE maintained that all staff employed or promoted on or after December 16th, 2008, would be contractually obliged to be rostered for weekend working.

It said the requirement to match working patterns to service needs was set out in a HSE circular going back to 2009, as well as in successive public service pay agreements.

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The HSE told The Irish Times there was now “a critical mass” of consultants in hospitals operating under the new public patient-only contract, which provides for senior doctors to work on Saturdays and later in the evening on weekdays.

It said it needed other health professionals to work outside the traditional Monday-Friday working week.

It also needs staff – some administrative, some nursing/allied health professionals – to be rostered on five out of seven days.

“Engagements have taken place with health unions and a final HSE proposal is in the last stage of feedback from the unions. Once cleared, there will be a mechanism for each [HSE] region to move to a roster in this new format. The initial rosters to be implemented will be in two categories of work:

(a) Supporting services which have a direct benefit on patient flow such as emergency department avoidance, emergency department care and in hospital care such as diagnostics and discharge.

(b) Supporting the establishment of a minimum number of outpatient clinics on Saturday in hospital and or community primary care centres as a means of big reform.”

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Mr Gloster said in a statement: “We are determined to make this change which will be the basis for radical reform in access to care and patient flow and we hope to see the first fixed rosters in place over the summer. The prioritisation of this by Minister [for Health] Jennifer Carroll MacNeill is significant.”

Minutes of the meeting in April of the Health Budget Oversight Group, which looks at spending in the health sector, said: “Both HSE and Department of Health noted that they are examining the option of making changes to consultant rosters to ensure a more even distribution of consultants over seven days.”

Mr Gloster said: “We know consultants work hard, we know many are in at weekends for different things, we know the service is emergency/on call at weekends as opposed to core service. It is the move to core that is central to our plans on rosters. We have all the tools now, we have 25 per cent more staff, we need to utilise it to the maximum in the public interest.”