

Tens of thousands of health staff appointed since 2008 can have rosters changed, says HSE chief

Martin Wall, Emmet Malone

4-5 minutes

Tens of thousands of health staff appointed or promoted since December 2008 are liable to be rostered to work over an extended day/week and managers should prepare to implement these arrangements, the head of the HSE has said.

In a directive to regional managers, Bernard Gloster said that they had “sanction to make roster changes to this cohort of staff, subject to notification of two weeks, with immediate effect”.

However, Fórsa, the largest public service trade union, warned there would be “an appropriate response” if the HSE sought unilaterally to instruct staff to change their working hours outside the provisions of existing agreements.

The union said the memo sanctioned “the introduction of an extended working day (between 8am and 8pm) and an extended working week (five days over seven) for all staff employed or promoted since December 16th, 2008”.

Fórsa said the “aggressive approach” by management completely ignored provisions under existing agreements “and must not be tolerated”.

Mr Gloster told his regional managers and wider leadership team in a memo last Friday that he wanted to ensure “that maximum effort is applied to expand the rosters on an extended day/week basis”.

He wrote: “As an immediate initiative to increase capacity, employees who have been issued with a contract (new and/or promotional) since December 16th, 2008 are liable to be rostered to work an extended day/week. You are reminded that you have sanction to make roster changes to this cohort of staff, subject to notification of two weeks, with immediate effect.

“ Employees may be required to work the agreed roster and/or on call arrangements advised to them by their line manager. The focus is, however, more on rostered presence. Their contracted hours of work are liable to change between the hours of 8am-8pm over seven days to meet the requirements for extended day services.

“Please take immediate action to continue to give effect to this.”

Albert Murphy, chair of the National Joint Council, a body that includes representatives of staff from across the HSE, told Mr Gloster in a letter this week the manner in which the move had been made was not in accordance with the normal consultation procedures.

He expressed surprise at the move as the two sides were due to meet on Thursday.

He said the 2008 agreement made it clear any plan to expand of services over weekends should take account of the resources available to existing services.

Mr Gloster said new "public only" contract for hospital consultants had specified positions with regard to work from Monday to Saturday, while other senior doctors had different provisions.

He said the public service pay deal maintained that "the parties will engage with a view to agreeing revised working arrangements and work practices to be introduced in support of the delivery of improved and more accessible public services over a seven-day week where a need for this has been identified".

Mr Gloster said HSE management was in talks to unions about implementing this provision, and would be specifically focusing on those staff recruited before 2008.

"However, in the interim there is to be an immediate planning of and local notice to staff hired or promoted since 2008, to prepare for a move to rostering on a 5/7 basis and for the appropriate distribution of rostering of consultants under the public-only consultant contract (or the provisions of previous contracts) to ensure an adequate on-site rostered presence of decision making and decision implementation for both patient flow and outpatient working late evenings and weekends," he said.

"It is acknowledged that significant improvements to patient care, experience and patient safety can be made through shifting to a more consistent delivery over the course of the seven-day week in both acute settings and across community services."

The Irish Times reported last month that the Government had instructed the HSE to introduce "a more decisive shift" in staff working arrangements, to ensure more services for patients were available over an extended day, into the evening and at weekends.

Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill told Cabinet this week that she was concerned at a spike in the number of patients on trolleys over the February bank holiday weekend.