

**Speech by Minister.**

**On the Adjournment of Dail Éireann on**

**22<sup>nd</sup> April 2010**

*" The failure to provide a Nursing Home Support Scheme for short stay patients; the fact that no such scheme was introduced in tandem with the Fair Deal Nursing Home Support Scheme is causing severe financial hardship for patients and families; who require short term stay in nursing homes. The Minister for Health and Children must address this situation immediately and put in place a short stay nursing home support scheme as soon as possible. "*

**Deputy Pat Breen**

I would like to thank Deputy Breen for raising this issue. It provides me with an opportunity to update the House on recent and proposed policy developments in relation to services for older people.

This Government is committed to supporting people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not possible, the health service supports access to quality long-term residential care and we continue to develop and improve health services in all regions of the country and to ensure quality and patient safety.

The year 2009 was a time of fundamental change and reform within the nursing home sector. In addition to the new Quality Standards, Care and Welfare Regulations and system of independent inspection for all nursing homes, the Minister for Health and Children also introduced a new scheme of financial support for long-term nursing home care, *A Fair Deal*.

The Fair Deal scheme was introduced in order to address the fundamental inequity in the treatment of public and private long-term nursing home residents and in order to alleviate the financial hardship being experienced by long-term residents in private nursing homes.

Prior to the introduction of the scheme, many people in long-term nursing home care experienced unaffordable care costs over periods of many years. The result was that many people had to sell or remortgage their houses or had to turn to family and friends in order to find the money to meet their care costs.

A fundamental purpose of the new scheme, therefore, was to offer assurance to one of the most of the vulnerable groups in society- those in need of long-term nursing home care- that such care will be affordable and will remain affordable for as long as they need it.

The Government also recognises that many people need short-term care in nursing homes from time to time. The HSE provides significant short-term care, including over 750 designated respite care beds benefiting an estimated 19,000 people. It also provides in excess of 1,000 dedicated rehabilitative, convalescence and assessment beds within its own facilities. In addition, the HSE is currently working to reconfigure services within its own facilities to ensure that the best possible use is made of public resources with regard to the provision of both long-term and short-term residential care services.

Finally, the Department of Social Protection provides a respite care grant which may be used to purchase short-term care in private nursing homes.

With regard to the extension of the Fair Deal scheme to short-term care patients, it must be noted that the scheme involves long-term co-payment arrangements between applicants and the HSE, including the possibility of entering into a loan agreement secured by a mortgage.

The feasibility of extending these arrangements to short-term patients would have to be carefully considered.

However, the Government is committed to developing a financially sustainable funding model to support all long-term care services, both community and residential care services. It is envisaged that this work would also encompass short-term residential care such as respite and convalescence care. This commitment by Government is reflected in the current social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, and preliminary work has commenced within the Department of Health and Children on the analysis of funding models.

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