Minister Lynch launches Fitness to Practise for Ireland’s Health and Social Care Professionals

CORU, Ireland’s Health and Social Care Professional Regulator will protect the public by ensuring professional standards are being met

**Wednesday, 21 January 2015:** The Minister with responsibility for Primary and Social Care, Ms Kathleen Lynch TD, today officially launched Fitness to Practice for Ireland’s regulated Health and Social Care Professions. For the first time CORU, Ireland’s Health and Social Care Regulator, can enact their legal and investigative powers to examine complaints from members of the public, on any event that took place after the 31 December 2014, about the professional conduct of a health and social care professional, ultimately determining whether a registered professional is fit to practice or not. Full details on the Fitness to Practice complaints process is available on the public information section of [www.coru.ie](http://www.coru.ie).

CORU, Ireland’s Health and Social Care Professionals Regulator will enforce the new Fitness to Practice regime. The Regulator will examine formal complaints made to it about a registered practitioner and will hold Fitness to Practice hearings if, following preliminary inquiries, it is satisfied that a hearing is merited.

CORU protects the public by setting the professional standards required for registered Health and Social Care practitioners. These standards are set out in the Professional Code of Conduct and Ethics of each regulated profession.

Speaking ahead of the launch Minister for Health Leo Varadkar said: “This is a significant step for patient protection. The vast majority of health and social care professionals do excellent work, and this new Fitness to Practice regime will help to protect standards across the health and social care sectors and give important powers to patients. For the first time it will be possible for members of the public to get formal complaints examined against a host of professions including dieticians, social workers, opticians, physiotherapists and others.”

Launching the new Fitness to Practice regime Minister Kathleen Lynch said, “I am pleased to be launching this essential requirement which will help to ensure that our Health and Social Care professionals maintain the highest standards of practice in the conduct of their work. Not only will it lead to better quality of care right across the sector, it will also provide patients, clients, and their families with a mechanism to complain if they are unhappy about any aspect of the care or service being delivered. This is so important in light of recent revelations of mistreatment in other sectors of our social services.”
Ms. Ginny Hanrahan, CEO, CORU said; “If a registered health and social care professional is unfit to practise, they put the safety of the public at risk. We now have the legal authority to ensure that, if an issue in relation to actions of a registrant is brought to CORU, we can respond, holding Fitness to Practise hearings if necessary. Protecting the public is our primary remit and, while the majority of practitioners operate to the highest professional standards, we will not hesitate to take action if and when necessary”.

Mr Tom Jordan, Chair of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, said: “The public will be familiar with Fitness to Practise hearings held for other professionals such as doctors and nurses. The opening of this function within CORU is the critical next stage in what is a new regulatory environment for health and social care professionals. I congratulate the members of Council and the professional registration boards for their work in introducing the important new regulatory framework”.

Registered professions currently subject to the Fitness to Practise include Social Workers, Radiographers, Radiation Therapists, Dieticians and Speech & Language Therapists. Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians will become subject to Fitness to Practise in 2015. As the Registration Boards are appointed by the Department of Health for, social care workers, psychologists, podiatrists, medical scientists, clinical biochemists and orthoptists, these professions will also come under the CORU remit.

Ends.

Note to Editors:

The Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar TD, commenced Fitness to Practise for Ireland’s registered Health and Social Care Professions from 31 December 2014. CORU will examine a complaint against a registered health and social care practitioner that occurred on or from that date and determine if they are fit to practise or not.

Fitness to Practise does not replace the existing complaints processes operated by many employers. It examines those issues that affect a person’s ability to practise their profession, not just their current job. This includes professional misconduct and poor professional performance. Any person can make a complaint to CORU, but in so doing, must be prepared to give evidence at any Fitness to Practise hearing, which may be held in public.

Sanctions which can be imposed include:

a) Admonishment or censure;

b) Attachment of conditions to the registrant’s registration, including restrictions on the practice of the designated profession by the registrant;

c) Suspension of the registrant’s registration for a specified period;

d) Cancellation of the registrant’s registration;

e) Prohibition from applying for a specified period for the restoration of the registrant’s registration.

Information on the new Fitness to Practise regime is available for the public, employers and regulated professions on the public information section of www.coru.ie.
About CORU

CORU (www.coru.ie) is Ireland’s multi-profession health regulator, responsible for regulating health and social care professions.

CORU’s role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, professional education, training and competence amongst the designated professions.

The designated professions are social workers, clinical biochemists, dietitians, medical scientists, occupational therapists, orthoptists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, psychologists, radiographers, social care workers and speech and language therapists. The Optician’s Board is being transferred to CORU in 2015.

CORU was established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). It comprises the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards for each profession regulated by CORU.

For further information:

John Conroy, Communications Manager, CORU, Tel: 01 2971873 email: communications@coru.ie