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# ‘It’s shameful. We were there full on during Covid - we deserve a little respect’

By **Katherine Lawton**

‘FORGOTTEN’ staff in private and voluntary nursing homes protested outside the Department of Health yesterday, calling for their Covid Pandemic Payments to be expedited after a nine-month delay.

Almost a year after it was announced by the Government, the €1,000 promised to more than 40,000 staff who risked their lives on the Covid front line has still not been paid.

The money was promised in recognition of workers’ ‘heroic efforts’ during the pandemic – as many sacrificed their health or time with their families to shield elderly residents from the disease.

More than 2,000 letters from private and voluntary nursing home staff were delivered to the Department of Health yesterday by Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI), which organised the protest. The letters set out the ‘immense frustration, anger and upset’ felt by staff due to the delay.

NHI chief Tadhg Daly, said: ‘People left their families, or they stayed overnight in nursing homes, so they made very significant sacrifices and that is because they care.’

‘They worked to look after people through a very difficult and challenging period, particularly in the early stages when people didn’t know what they were facing.’

‘The Government promised a

recognition payment and they need to set a date for it now. It was announced on January 19, yet inexplicably, those in the private and voluntary nursing home sectors are still waiting to be paid.’

Mr Daly added: ‘We’ve been getting emails all through the last number of months from people concerned about it. We felt it was important to support them.’

One woman, Dianne Kirwan, who works as a carer at Aras Mhuire Nursing Facility in Co. Louth, said the Government’s delay in making the payment is ‘shameful’ considering the health risks the staff faced.

‘When no one else was allowed into nursing homes we were there full on, offering love, support and respect,’ she said.

‘We had no option but to hug and to care, and we didn’t have the option to keep two metres apart. We were masked, and we all supported each other and were a family, so we deserve to be treated with a little more respect.’

Ms Kirwan added: ‘We did our jobs like we do every single day, so we just feel let down by the Government.’

Meanwhile, a household manager at the same nursing facility, Julie McNeela, said she too feels let down after putting

her own health

and wellbeing at risk.

‘We didn’t have the choice to stay two metres away from anybody,’ she said.

‘We still gave the hugs, and the personal reassuring touches. They didn’t get to see their families, so we were their family.’

‘That’s why we feel we deserve this €1,000. We’ve been told we’ll get it as soon as possible, according to [Health Minister] Stephen Donnelly. At the beginning, he told us that we were wearing capes and that we are heroes, but we’re not being treated like heroes now,’ she added.

Mr Donnelly has been approached for comment.

**‘We’re not treated like heroes now’**

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Protest: Some 2,000 letters were given to the Department of Health