FACS Forum welcomes HSE’s plans to contact patients directly regarding Sodium Valproate

**Tuesday, May 29, 2018**

Epilepsy Ireland and our partner organisations in the FACS Forum Ireland welcomes that the Health Service Executive is taking the step of directly writing to women taking Sodium Valproate (Epilim) in the coming weeks to highlight the risks of the drug in pregnancy and to inform them of [recent changes](http://www.epilepsy.ie/index.cfm/spKey/news.epilepsy/spId/84C1599D-1FE7-44C2-91ADACCE03A51ED7.html) to how the drug is prescribed and monitored.

We also welcome immediate plans to write to GPs on a specific named patient basis to encourage them to organise consultations with their female patients on valproate to explain the risks in person and to make appropriate referrals to a specialist for treatment reviews.

The Forum, through its members Epilepsy Ireland and [OACS Ireland](https://www.oacscharity.org/oacs-ireland) are working closely with the HSE Valproate Response Group on a range of risk-reduction measures and we are encouraged that our concerns such as the need to distribute the new [Valproate booklet](http://www.epilepsy.ie/assets/87/621876D8-5B8A-44E8-AE2655F37A2BDDF9_document/Valproate_Epilim_Patient_Booklet_final.pdf) for patients alongside the letter and to set up a valproate helpline to support patients and their families are being addressed.

We believe that these steps are very important to have in place prior to letters being sent to over 3,000 women and girls currently taking valproate and we also hope that all GPs who have female patients on valproate will heed the HSE advice and arrange consultations with their patients in the coming weeks.

While writing to all valproate patients is likely to cause some distress for women who were previously unaware of the risks and for those who took the drug during a previous pregnancy, we believe that all women must be made aware of the risks associated with their treatment. The actions that are now being taken will help to ensure that the historical information deficit in relation to valproate is finally addressed.

 We are also calling on the HSE to put plans in place to accommodate the influx of many hundred new epilepsy and bi-polar patients into the specialist service and to ensure that hospital services around the country are adequately resourced and supported in meeting the increased case load.