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30th June 2020

Deputy Smith,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 11384/20 To ask the Minister for Health the status of the National Maternity Strategy; his plans to expand midwifery led units nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

In response to the National Maternity Strategy, the HSE with the support of the Department of Health established the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) to oversee and drive the implementation of the Strategy from a national perspective.

Since the publication of the Strategy, significant progress has been made in implementing the Model of Care as recommended in the Strategy and developing the recommended governance structures for maternity services. Achievements to date include the development of six maternity networks, expansion in community based antenatal midwifery care around the country in parallel to the development of early transfer home postnatal services, development and implementation of a hub and spoke model of perinatal mental health services, specialist midwifery provided bereavement services in all sites, and significant expansion in scanning services.

These developments have been enabled and supported by an investment programme in maternity services which has seen 180 additional posts being approved by NWIHP further to funding being made available by the Department to support the Strategy. This investment package to date has focused on additional consultant posts, registered and specialist midwifery posts including a suite of advanced midwifery posts in 2020, allied health professionals including medical social workers and dieticians, ultrasonographers and supporting the establishment of the six maternity networks.

The HSE and its NWIHP remain committed to the National Maternity Strategy and will continue to work closely with the Department of Health so as to secure the funding required to enable the active work programme in this area to continue.

Specifically in relation to midwifery led units in Irish maternity services, these were first developed in the north east of the country, with the maternity services in both Drogheda and Cavan having such centres on site. Each of these centres has dedicated clinical space including two specifically designed delivery suites to enable and support midwifery provided maternity services to women in their region.

With the publication of the National Maternity Strategy and in due cognisance of the infrastructure challenges that present on many of the existing clinical sites, the focus of the National Women and Infants Health Programme working closely with the relevant maternity services is currently on the development of home-away-from-home delivery suites within the maternity services. These suites effectively replicate the environment and birthing infrastructure available in Drogheda and Cavan.

These facilities are being implemented by means of refurbishment of ancillary clinical space adjacent to existing labour wards and/or refurbishment of existing traditional delivery suites. These facilities are a key enabler in delivering on the vision of enhanced midwifery care as set out in the National Strategy and are core to supporting the full implementation of the supported care pathway.

Limerick, Cork, Holles Street, Wexford, Mullingar and the Coombe all have in place home-away-from-home facilities, whilst a further five sites – Waterford, Sligo, Galway, Kerry and Portlaoise - are in the process of developing such facilities. Waterford and Sligo projects are nearing completion, with these newly refurbished facilities due to be available to women in their areas shortly.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme