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15th May 2020

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 5217/20 To ask the Minister for Health his plans to restore funding to the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter**

Dear Deputy O'Callaghan,

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.

Full compliance with the WHO BFHI is recommended in the National Maternity Strategy, 2016 - 2026. As part of the implementation of the Strategy all maternity hospitals and units are implementing the WHO/UNICEF "10 steps to Successful breastfeeding" and the HSE's Infant Feeding Policy for Maternity and Neonatal Services, 2019.

The HSE's National Women and Infants Health Programme is charged with the management and roll out of the National Maternity Strategy. As such the Programme provides oversight for the programme of work that is underway to implement the WHO BFHI.

The HSE's Health Promotion and Improvement Division, in partnership with the National Women and Infants Health Programme, is supporting a programme of work to develop standards for maternity hospitals/units that are aligned and benchmarked against best international standards as defined by WHO/UNICEF in this area.

The Women and Infants Health Programme as part of the HSE's annual Estimates process with the Department of Health continues to seek additional resources so as to enable the further development and deployment of breastfeeding supports across the acute and community sector. Funding has been allocated for 3 additional breastfeeding specialist posts in maternity hospitals in 2020.

Subsequent to the BFHI programme being paused by the HSE in 2017 so as to enable its review and ensure on-going alignment with best international practice in this area, a significant programme of work has been underway to develop a model for the implementation of the WHO BFHI in maternity hospitals/units.

This includes:

1. Development of standards
2. Undertaking baseline audit
3. Implementing updated policies

The revised model is aimed at increasing the engagement levels across all maternity hospitals in order to further increase breastfeeding rates in Ireland.

I hope this clarifies your question.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary-Jo Biggs', written in a cursive style.

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