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8th December 2020

Deputy Nolan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 38367/20 To ask the Minister for Health if he will address concerns raised (details supplied) which suggests that unborn children who underwent late term abortions in Irish hospitals survived the procedure resulting in conflict between foetal medical specialists and neonatologists with respect to the provision of palliative care; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Nolan,

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.

There are ten maternity units within the Republic of Ireland providing a Termination of Pregnancy (TOP) service. Planning for this service started after the 2018 referendum and staff members were heavily involved both nationally (in developing a service plan, reviewing educational material for women and writing national guidelines) and locally (planning the local service). This is a consultant and specialist nursing / midwifery provided service. Specialist mental health services are available if required by the mother.

Planning for terminations required due to foetal or maternal medical conditions involves the input of multiple medical specialities in order to provide safe, appropriate and best care. Given the sensitivity and the nature of the required care, there are on-going discussions regarding the procedure between the multi-disciplinary team and the woman and her support partner(s) before, during and after the procedure. All discussions are focused on providing a comprehensive care package, with good communication between all parties being central to all activities.

As per the interim clinical guidance on the pathway for management of fatal foetal abnormalities and/or life-limiting conditions during pregnancy and the clinical guidance regarding risk to life or health of a pregnant woman in relation to the provision of termination of pregnancy services, a multidisciplinary meeting takes place prior to the termination of pregnancy.

The multidisciplinary team including both foetal medical specialists and neonatologists works together in a cohesive manner in the provision of this care. Discussions between the specialities are both

complex and detailed. The entire multidisciplinary team is united in providing respectful, compassionate care, advocating for the needs of both mother and foetus. The staff makes every effort to be supportive at this very challenging and emotionally difficult time.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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