

***General Manager's Office,
Letterkenny University Hospital, Letterkenny Co. Donegal
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2nd November 2020

Deputy Thomas Pringle,

Dáil Éireann,

Leinster House,

Kildare Street,

Dublin 2.

PQ:32111/20

To ask the Minister for Health his plans for the way in which he and the HSE plan to provide for the additional perinatal mental health needs of the many women and families left traumatised by the current policy of some Irish hospitals, including Letterkenny University Hospital, County Donegal of not allowing women a partner of their choice to be physically present with them to support them throughout major milestone scans, labour and birth, including those women and families that have had to go through the unmitigated tragedy of pregnancy or baby loss alone, scared and devastated. -Thomas Pringle

Dear Deputy,

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

Letterkenny University Hospital has recruited a Perinatal Mental Health Midwife to support women's mental health throughout their pregnancy. The Perinatal Mental Health Midwife is in post since June 2020.

In Letterkenny University Hospital, birthing partners of women in labour are welcomed onto the labour ward for labour and the birth of their baby. If a partner has coronavirus symptoms they must not attend. In this instance, an alternative birth partner may attend. Birthing partners are welcome to attend for a caesarean section done under regional anaesthesia. This is subject to screening questions and wearing PPE in the theatre.

The Maternity Department at Letterkenny University Hospital is committed to ensuring that to the best of their ability the impact of COVID-19 on services and the pregnancy experience of every mother and their partner should be kept to an absolute minimum wherever feasible. We acknowledge the anxieties and frustrations these restrictions have caused for women and their partners. However, the hospital must prioritise the safety of all patients and staff, and do everything we can to ensure hospitals are protected from the ever-present threat of COVID-19. All involved in the provision of maternity care look forward to the time when we can revert to a more open door policy.

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Since the end of August, a single two hour visit by the birth partner (or next of kin, if the partner is not available) is facilitated on the maternity ward, post-delivery between 8am and 8.30pm. Outside of these times the partner are allowed a 30 minute visit the following day at an allocated time.

In the event of a hospital stay greater than 48 hours, partners are offered a two hour visit and the scheduled time is decided after the daily ward round.

Visits by partners are subject to screening for COVID-19 risk factors and visiting will not be permitted if any risk factors are present.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Seán Murphy
General Manager
Letterkenny University Hospital