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13<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Deputy O'Reilly,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ Ref 22370/21: To ask the Minister for Health if clinical midwife and nurse specialist lactation consultants have been appointed within all Irish maternity and paediatric hospitals, according to a determined births-to support staff ratio, with dedicated CMS/CNS lactation in NICUs; the proportion of CMS, CNS whole-time equivalent per births in maternity units and per admissions currently; the cost of ensuring the appointment of these according to a determined births-to support staff ratio; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy O'Reilly,

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.

The HSE is committed to protecting, supporting and promoting breastfeeding. Breastfeeding support has been shown to be most effective where it is face to face, scheduled and predictable and provided by trained health professionals and/or peer counsellors. Midwives and Public Health Nurses are trained and are skilled in providing breastfeeding support commencing in the antenatal period in the delivery of antenatal/breastfeeding education. Midwives support the establishment of breastfeeding immediately after birth and help mothers learn the skill of breastfeeding in the immediate post-natal period. Public Health Nurses, many of whom are Midwives and Paediatric Nurses are trained and skilled in providing breastfeeding support throughout the post-natal period.

Integrating routine lactation consultant support improves the experience of care mothers receive and breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. Breastfeeding clinics and online breastfeeding support meetings are provided by HSE and HSE funded voluntary breastfeeding organisations around the country. Facilitators of these groups have International Board Certified Lactation Consultant qualifications or are experienced trained peer counsellors. Maternity hospital staff are available for support if needed after mothers and babies are discharged home from hospital.

Up until 2020 the implementation of the Breastfeeding Action Plan has been undertaken within existing HSE resources. Funding for 3 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) additional lactation consultant posts in maternity hospitals/units, was received in 2020. A further 7.5 WTE lactation consultant posts will be funded through the National Maternity Strategy in 2021 to ensure every maternity unit/hospital will have

at least one consultant lactation post in place. Recruitment is on-going regarding the filling of these additional posts.

There are currently 21.26 WTE dedicated lactation consultant posts filled across the 19 maternity hospitals/units providing specialised care for mothers experiencing challenges with breastfeeding. They also support the development of skills and knowledge of other front line colleagues. In the larger units, consultant lactation support would be provided to the tertiary NICUs. Please see over the page details regarding the number and location of lactation consultants per maternity sites and service.

Comparisons with international staffing benchmarks suggest that there remains a requirement for 23.5 additional posts dedicated to lactation support within maternity and community services. A funding commitment was announced by Minister for Health for €1.58M to support provision of 24 additional lactation consultant posts in the HSE on 12/05. Work is currently underway to determine the final allocation of these additional posts taking into consideration such issues as births per maternity unit, existing resources in place or due to come on stream and other pertinent factors such as socio-economic considerations.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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

<i>Hospital</i>	<i>WTE in Post April 2021</i>	<i>WTE Funded and In Process of Being Recruited</i>
NMH	3.42	
Wexford Hospital	0	1 New
St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny	1	
Mullingar	1	
Coombe	4	1 New
Portlaoise	0.5	
Rotunda	2	1 New
Drogheda	2	1 New
Cavan	0.8	
Limerick	2	
Galway	0.5	0.5 New
Letterkenny	0	1 New
Mayo	0	1 New
Sligo	0	1 New
Portiuncula	1	0
Cork	1.54	1 New
Clonmel	0.5	0.5 Replacement
Kerry	1	1 New
Waterford	0	1 New