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02<sup>nd</sup> March 2021

Deputy Sherlock  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ Ref 8673/21: To ask the Minister for Health his plans to expand the number of international board-certified lactation consultants employed in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Sherlock,

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.

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. Every new mother is seen by a Public Health Nurse with 72 hours of leaving hospital and follow up support is provided to breastfeeding mothers.

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.

There are 30.39 Whole Time Equivalent dedicated Lactation Consultant posts across Maternity Hospitals and units and Public Health Nursing services to provide specialised care for mothers experiencing challenges with breastfeeding. They also support the development of skills and knowledge of other front line colleagues. This represents an increase of 12.97 Whole Time Equivalent Lactation Consultant posts in the last 4 years. It is acknowledged that further development and investment in this area is required going forward when compared with international staffing benchmarks. A further 6.5 dedicated lactation

consultant posts and a national lead to support implementation of National Standards for the Baby Friendly Initiative have been funded through the National Maternity Strategy and are expected to be in post in 2021.

Other supports have been developed during the pandemic, with a number of hospital antenatal breastfeeding classes and some breastfeeding groups run by the HSE and voluntary organisations moving online. Over 60 virtual breastfeeding support group meetings are held each month. Phone and virtual breastfeeding support is also being made available to replace face-to-face appointments, while face-to-face one-to-ones are being provided where needed. The HSE run a free online breastfeeding advice and information service staffed by experienced lactation consultants 7 days a week at [www.mychild.ie](http://www.mychild.ie), there was a 38% increase in demand for the service in 2020 with almost 4,000 breastfeeding questions answered via live chat or e-mail.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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