



Clár Sláinte Náisiúnta do Mhná & do Naíonáin
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte, Aonad 7A, Áras
Dargan, An Ceantar Theas, Baile Átha Cliath 8
T: 076 695 9991

National Women and Infants Health Programme
Health Service Executive, Unit 7A, The Dargan Building,
Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8
T: 076 695 9991

9th February 2021

Deputy Cairns,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 4955/21 To ask the Minister for Health the number of lactation consultants provided by the HSE in each operational area; the ratio of consultants to mothers on which this number is based in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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 also trained as 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. Approximately 200 staff working within the HSE e.g. Midwives, Public Health Nurses, medical doctors also hold an additional International Board Certified Lactation Consultant qualification.

Integrating routine lactation consultant support has been shown to improve the experience of care that mothers receive and breastfeeding initiation and duration rates in Ireland and internationally. Breastfeeding clinics and online breastfeeding support meetings are provided by the 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.

The HSE also run a free online breastfeeding advice and information service staffed by experienced International Board Certified Lactation Consultants 7 days a week, 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.

In addition to these supports, the HSE also have a cohort of posts based both within maternity services and within public health nursing services which are dedicated lactation consultant posts so as to provide specialised care for mothers experiencing challenges with breastfeeding which is over and above that referenced above. These dedicated posts also support the development of the skills and knowledge of other front line colleagues in the area of breastfeeding. The location and number of these posts is set out below in tabular format in relation to lactation consultants in the area of midwifery and lactation consultants in the area of public health nursing. It is acknowledged that these numbers are low when compared with international staffing benchmarks and that they are gaps in availability throughout the country. However the HSE is committed to addressing same, with further investment to be made in new lactation consultant posts in Mayo General, Sligo General and University College Hospital Galway during the course of 2021.

Table 1 outlines the location and number of staff working in dedicated breastfeeding roles in maternity services. Data on the ratio of consultants to mothers is not available.

Hospital	No of midwives/nurses in dedicated breastfeeding posts	Additional Information
Ireland East Hospital Group		
National Maternity Hospital Dublin	3	
Wexford Hospital	0	Post sanctioned, waiting recruitment
St. Luke's Hospital Kilkenny	1	
Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar Co Westmeath	1	
Dublin Midlands Hospital Group		
Coombe Women and Infant's University Hospital Dublin	3	
Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise	1	
RCSI		
Rotunda Hospital Dublin	2	
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	2	
Cavan General Hospital	2	
University of Limerick Hospital Group		
University Maternity Hospital Limerick	2	
Saolta Hospital Group		
University College Hospital Galway	1	
Letterkenny General Hospital	0	Post sanctioned, waiting recruitment
Mayo General Hospital Castlebar	0	
Sligo General Hospital	0	
Portiuncula Hospital Ballinasloe	1	
South/ South West Hospital Group		
Cork University Maternity Hospital	2	
South Tipperary General Hospital Clonmel	1	
Kerry General Hospital	1	
University Hospital Waterford	0	Post sanctioned, waiting recruitment

Table 2 outlines the location and number of staff working in dedicated breastfeeding roles in primary care services. Data on the ratio of consultants to mothers is not available.

Health Service Area	Number of dedicated PHN Posts for Breastfeeding
CHO 1	
Cavan/Monaghan	1
CHO 3	
Clare	1
Limerick	1
North Tipperary	1
CHO4	
North Lee	1
West Cork	1
CHO 5	
South Tipperary	1
CHO6	
Wicklow South	1
Dublin South East	1
Dun Laoghaire	1
Wicklow North	1
CHO8	
Longford/Westmeath	1

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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