



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

April 09th 2021

Deputy Shortall,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 15635/21: To ask the Minister for Health the number of International Board of Lactation Consultant certified lactation consultants holding specialist posts in each maternity unit

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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.

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 20.59 Whole Time Equivalent Lactation Consultant posts within Maternity Hospitals and units 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 7.17 Whole Time Equivalent Lactation Consultant posts in the last 4 years. It is acknowledged that these numbers need to grow further when compared with international staffing benchmarks and gaps still remain in terms of consistent availability throughout the country. A further 6.5 additional Lactation Consultant posts for maternity services and a national lead to support implementation of National Standards for the Baby Friendly Initiative in hospitals have been funded through the National Maternity Strategy in 2020 and 2021 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, 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.

The table overpage outlines the whole time equivalent number of Lactation Consultant posts in maternity hospitals presently. Additionally there are a significant number of midwives, nurses and medical doctors working across maternity hospitals who are International Board Certified Lactation Consultants which add value to the breastfeeding support provided to mothers and babies.

Hospital	WTE Feb 2021	Comment
Ireland East Hospital Group		
National Maternity Hospital Dublin	3.42	
Wexford Hospital	0	1 WTE In 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	4	
Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise	0.5	
RCSI		
Rotunda Hospital Dublin	2	awaiting recruitment of additional 1WTE community post
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	1.33	
Cavan General Hospital	0.8	
University of Limerick Hospital Group		
University Maternity Hospital Limerick	2	
Saolta Hospital Group		
University College Hospital Galway	0.5	funding allocated to additional .5 WTE
Letterkenny General Hospital	0	1 WTE In recruitment
Mayo General Hospital Castlebar	0	funding allocated to 1 WTE
Sligo General Hospital	0	funding allocated for 1 WTE
Portiuncula Hospital Ballinasloe	1	
South/ South West Hospital Group		
Cork University Maternity Hospital	1.54	
South Tipperary General Hospital Clonmel	0.5	awaiting recruitment of further .5 WTE
Kerry General Hospital	1	
University Hospital Waterford	0	1 WTE In recruitment
	20.59	

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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