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14th July 2021

Deputy Nolan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 24618/21: To ask the Minister for Health the status of the measures being taken to expand access to termination of pregnancy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Nolan,

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.

Termination of Pregnancy (ToP) services are currently provided in 10 of the 19 maternity units/hospitals. The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP), in conjunction with the Department of Health (DoH), is committed to the continued expansion of termination service provision across the nine maternity units who are currently not providing a full ToP service.

There are nine maternity hospitals not currently providing terminations for women under 12 weeks, however, all maternity hospitals are providing the following ToP related services:

- Managing complications arising from termination.
- Providing appropriate care and supervision for women following a diagnosis of fatal fetal abnormality, and referral to the appropriate tertiary unit.
- Providing appropriate care and supervision in cases where maternal health/life is at risk, and referral to the appropriate tertiary hospital, as appropriate.

As of May 2021, 398 GPs had signed a contract to provide termination of pregnancy services. There is a good geographic spread of GPs taking part

The NWIHP and the Clinical Lead for Termination of Pregnancy services had a schedule of hospital visits planned for 2020. These visits were designed to support sites where the service was operational and to engage with the non-providing sites to work with them to overcome any obstacles preventing the commencement of the full service. Unfortunately the Covid-19 impact has meant that many of these visits have not taken place, and it is likely to be quarter 3 2021 before site visits can recommence.

The NWIHP and the National Clinical Lead for Termination of Pregnancy services are working in collaboration with key partners to progress a number of enabling initiatives to drive the continued expansion of termination of pregnancy services. Areas include:

Training on abortion care:

The Institute of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (IoG), as the postgraduate training body recognised by the Irish Medical Council for this purpose, has developed a comprehensive online training package. This training package will be made available to all trainees and members. Training on abortion care has been included in the curriculum for all basic and specialty trainees in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Values clarification workshops:

In addition to skills training, participating in values clarification exercises can help healthcare providers differentiate their own personal beliefs & attitudes from the needs of women seeking termination of pregnancy. The WHO facilitated a number of workshops focusing on Implementing Safe Termination of Pregnancy Care in Ireland in 2018. These workshops focussed on equipping staff who attended with the skills to roll out the values clarification training in their own units. The Covid-19 impact has been a limiting factor in this space.

ToP related Clinical Guidance and Clinical support documents:

Guideline development groups have been established across a range of areas to review and/or develop ToP related clinical guidance and clinical support documents.

Peer support and mentoring mechanisms:

The NWIHP is currently linking with the ICGP and the IOG to explore opportunities for peer support and mentoring mechanisms, promoting best practice and to provide a forum for professional development and access to termination related resources and information.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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