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National Women and Infants Health Programme
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16th November 2021

Deputy Bacik,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ52032/21: To ask the Minister for Health if he will develop a national ambition to reduce pregnancy and infant loss; if he will establish a committee tasked with examining stillbirth and neonatal death in Ireland with a view to producing recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ52033/21: To ask the Minister for Health if his Department plans to run an awareness campaign to inform pregnant women and persons of the risk of stillbirth and the importance of foetal movement during the third-trimester.

Dear Deputy Bacik,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

One of the key functions of The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) is to provide oversight for the quality and safety of our maternity services. The ambition of NWIHP in this regard is to reduce the incidence of adverse events, enhancing the safety of maternity care. Data collection and analysis is vital in the quality improvement process. Recognising this, NWIHP have encouraged the development and implementation of the maternity focused Serious Incident Management Forum (SIMF) within each Maternity Network as a key objective of the Programme. These SIMFs provide robust and high level oversight of adverse outcomes within each Network and underpin the quality & safety standards in the 19 maternity units.

In addition, the NWIHP have established the Obstetric Event Support Team (OEST) to assist in extracting learnings from adverse events, providing a mechanism for sharing this learning locally and nationally. The OEST have identified early neonatal death as one event that requires particular attention. Valuable data that can influence clinical practice in a constructive way is also reported to NWIHP via Patient Safety Statements (PSS) and the Irish Maternity Indicator system (IMIS). Annual IMIS reports can be found on the HSE website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/national-reports-on-womens-health/>

The NWIHP work collaboratively with the National Perinatal Epidemiology Centre (NPEC) to support the functions of the department and help to close the audit loop. The NWIHP has demonstrated continued commitment to the collection of NPEC's audit data, report publication and the implementation of its recommendations. NWIHP welcomes the recommendations of the recent NPEC report on Perinatal Mortality in Ireland and looks forward to working closely both with NPEC and the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to review stillbirth and neonatal deaths to identify causal factors and mitigate risk where possible.

In relation to public awareness of the importance of fetal movements, information is delivered via antenatal education. NWIPH developed the National Standards for Antenatal Education in Ireland in 2020 based on the needs identified by The National Maternity Strategy 2016 (link below).

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/child-health-and-wellbeing/antenatal-ed.pdf>

As part of this work to improve the quality of information parents receive, the HSE launched the HSE My Pregnancy Book in 2018. This is a free book offered to pregnant women offering advice to help through each stage of pregnancy and promotes awareness of the importance of fetal movement during the third trimester. The electronic version of this book can be downloaded from the HSE website;

<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/babies-and-children/pregnancy-child-books/>

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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