



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Holly Cairns,  
Dail Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

08th December 2021

**PQ Number: 54444/21**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health if he will consider putting in place mental health teams dedicated to supporting expectant and bereaved mothers and families - Holly Cairns**

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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.

Perinatal mental health services are specialist services for women with a mental health problem. The service is for pregnant women and women with a baby up to one year old who may have an existing or new mental health problem and also women with severer mental health problems and are planning a pregnancy. Although as many as 1 in 5 women have mental health problems in pregnancy or after birth a perinatal mental health service will usually look after someone who has a more serious or complex mental health problem. So, not every woman with a mental health problem during pregnancy, or after their baby is born, will need this service. Women can get good care from their GP and public health nurse (PHN) for milder mental health problems in pregnancy and after birth.

The National Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Programme Model of Care launched in November 2017 is based on the maternity networks recommended in the National Maternity Strategy and aligned to hospital groups, developed in a hub and spoke format with all 19 maternity services included. There are now over 70 staff members working in Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services nationally. With up to 10 staff in the 6 maternity Hub Sites and Perinatal Mental Health Midwives available in all 13 spoke sites. The hub sites are based in line with the maternity strategy. In 2021 the SPMHS received additional funding for a second Perinatal Mental Health Midwife in four hub sites.

The specialist teams and perinatal mental health midwives work jointly to ensure that all women attending the maternity service will have information on positive mental health. Since June 2020 the 12 PMH leaflets developed by the experts in the PMH service are available to order free of charge for individual women and frontline healthcare services at [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie).

Whilst the focus of the Model of Care (MOC) was on the specialist component of a perinatal mental health strategy, it is hoped and expected that this will act as the catalyst for all relevant service areas in the HSE to come together to implement a comprehensive mental health strategy. For this reason

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the MOC also included a section on the clinical pathway for a complete perinatal mental health response.

Also since June 2020 the National Programme for SPMHS has developed A Handbook for Perinatal Mental Health Midwives working in spoke sites. The Programme working jointly with the Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director (OMNSD) has developed A National Guidance Framework to Enhance Knowledge and Skills for Perinatal Mental Health (PMH) Midwives, Clinical Midwife Manager 2 (CMM2) which was launched just this week.

All new frontline staff working in Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services have been provided with specific induction and specialist training in line with their discipline and role within the multidisciplinary team. The National Programme also has a National Oversight Implementation Group (NOIG) which consists of a psychiatrist from each hub site as well as a national nominee from each other discipline on the SPMH multidisciplinary team. The NOIG meet every two months and address:

- the recruitment of hub teams and spoke staff
- clinical activity
- training needs
- accommodation for teams

and other relevant matters.

The Specialist Perinatal Healthcare App for healthcare professionals continues to be updated regularly. It is designed to provide specific PMH information and information on how to access service for all frontline staff, as well as detailed PMH training materials. The PMH app has been downloaded by approximately 1,500 frontline healthcare professionals, the majority being midwives and public health nurses. The app provides easy access to the latest information from the service for all staff including GPs and practice nurses. Since June 2020 specific information was added for GPs following a specific piece of work with GP Buddy who developed a series of questions for the perinatal service. These were answered by Dr. Richard Duffy, Perinatal Psychiatrist, Rotunda Hospital. New video resources were also added such as the SPMHS Me to Mum videos and videos to raise awareness of women from the travelling community to perinatal mental health supports.

Specialist perinatal mental health services are provided in maternity hospitals and teams aim to see women in convenient and child friendly locations. These include both Antenatal clinics and Maternity wards. However, in recent times because of covid-19 the use of Video Enabled Care through [Attend Anywhere](#) (AA) has supported women to connect with their perinatal mental health service. For some women, clinicians can provide support and interventions online through this platform. The rollout and support for this platform in the form of equipment and training for all hub and spoke sites took place since June 2020. For new mothers, it allows therapy to be provided in their own environment, without the constraints of travel or having to bring a newborn to an appointment. Video calls through AA may provide a blended approach to linking with the service; allowing accessibility for those who have limited transport links or cannot drive following a C-section.

The National Programme has also presented to the DOH Woman's Health Taskforce and submitted a business plan for an additional 0.4WTE Consultant Psychiatrist for GUH and 4 additional perinatal mental health midwives for 4 of the larger Hub sites. This submission was successful and a number of posts have already been filled.

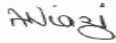
Two of the main areas to be addressed in 2021 include appropriate accommodation for Hub site teams, in particular in the three HSE hub sites, that is, UMHL, CUMH and GUH and the development

of the Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit which will be the National Programmes focus for World Maternal Mental Health Day 2021 on the 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

For more information on the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service please see the following link [here](#).

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



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