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29<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Deputy Bacik,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ 43684/21: To ask the Minister for Health the number of lactation consultants that are currently available in the public health service to support new mothers; if he will provide a breakdown by maternity unit; the number of publicly employed lactation consultants that are currently working on Covid-19 related duties such as swabbing; if there are personnel assigned to do so, when they started and when they will return to maternity services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Bacik,

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.

The HSE is committed to protecting, supporting and promoting breastfeeding. 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.

Up until 2020 the implementation of the Breastfeeding Action Plan has been undertaken within existing HSE resources. Funding for 3 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) additional lactation consultant posts in maternity hospitals/units, was received in 2020. A further 7.5 WTE lactation consultant posts will be funded through the National Maternity Strategy in 2021 to ensure every maternity unit/hospital will have

at least one consultant lactation post in place. Recruitment is on-going regarding the filling of these additional posts.

There are currently 24.26 WTE dedicated lactation consultant posts filled across the 19 maternity hospitals/units with a further 4.5 WTE actively being recruited ,and 10 WTE in community services providing specialised care for mothers experiencing challenges with breastfeeding. They also support the development of skills and knowledge of other front line colleagues. In the larger units, consultant lactation support would be provided to the tertiary NICUs. Please see over the page details regarding the number and location of lactation consultants per maternity sites and service.

Comparisons with international staffing benchmarks suggest that there remains a requirement for 23.5 additional posts dedicated to lactation support within maternity and community services. A funding commitment was announced by Minister for Health for €1.58M to support provision of 24 additional lactation consultant posts in the HSE on 12/05. Work is currently underway to determine the final allocation of these additional posts taking into consideration such issues as births per maternity unit, existing resources in place or due to come on stream and other pertinent factors such as socio-economic considerations.

The table below outlines the location and number of staff (whole time equivalents) of lactation consultant posts currently approved and funded within maternity services. As far as we are aware all publically employed lactation consultants are currently working in their area of remit and as such are not currently working on Covid-19 related duties such as swabbing.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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

<i>Hospital</i>	<i>WTE in Post Sept 2021</i>	<i>WTE Funded and In Process of Being Recruited</i>
<b>Ireland East Hospital Group</b>		
National Maternity Hospital Dublin	3.42	
Wexford Hospital	1	
St. Luke's Hospital Kilkenny	1	
Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar	1	
<b>Dublin Midlands Hospital Group</b>		
Coombe Women and Infant's University Hospital	4	
Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise	0.5	.5 WTE in recruitment
<b>RCSI</b>		
Rotunda Hospital Dublin	2	1 WTE in recruitment
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	2	
Cavan General Hospital	0.8	
<b>University of Limerick Hospital Group</b>		
University Maternity Hospital Limerick	2	
<b>Saolta Hospital Group</b>		
University College Hospital Galway	0.5	.5 WTE in recruitment
Letterkenny General Hospital	1	
Mayo General Hospital	0	1 WTE in recruitment
Sligo General Hospital	0	1 WTE in recruitment
Portiuncula Hospital Ballinasloe	1	
<b>South/ South West Hospital Group</b>		
Cork University Maternity Hospital	1.54	
South Tipperary General Hospital	0.5	.5 WTE in recruitment
Kerry General Hospital	1	
University Hospital Waterford	1	
<b>Childrens Hospitals</b>		
Temple street	0	
Crumlin	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.26</b>	<b>4.5</b>