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8th October 2021

Deputy Canney,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 45983/21: To ask the Minister for Health if Irish hospitals perform surgery on unborn children for any conditions; and if so, if a list of the conditions and the location in which they are carried out will be provided.

PQ Ref 45984/21: To ask the Minister for Health if Irish hospitals perform surgery on unborn children with spina bifida; if so, the amount that has been allocated to in utero care for babies with spina bifida in Ireland.

Dear Deputy Canney,

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.

In relation to the provision of interventional procedures / surgery on unborn children in Ireland, a small number of such procedures are undertaken in Ireland, all in the Dublin area, utilizing a combination of clinical expertise from tertiary maternity services and specialist CHI services as appropriate.

The most common procedure undertaken is laser therapy to divide abnormal placenta vascular connections in twins. There are approximately 15 such cases managed annually. Additionally, cases involving antenatal chest drain insertion for chylothorax are managed, with 2 to 3 such cases per year being managed. The insertion of antenatal bladder drains for urinary bladder obstruction is also provided, with again the number of cases being managed in this regard ranging between 2 to 3 per year.

Specifically in relation to antenatal spina bifida repair, this highly specialized procedure is not performed in Ireland. Rather tertiary maternity services have access to structured international referral pathways for the management of this condition, with women being referred to centres of excellence abroad for care, including Leuven in Belgium. Approximately five mothers per year are referred abroad for management of this surgical procedure. Wrap around care, before and after the procedure, for mother and baby are provided within Ireland, including the national specialist foetal MRI services based in Holles Street which monitors and tracks the well-being of the baby pre and post-surgery

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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