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13th October 2021

Deputy Wynne,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ46959/21: To ask the Minister for Health if additional staff were put in place in neonatal intensive care units to deal the additional care needs of newborns in view of the fact that there has been limited parental access to due to the restrictions imposed on maternity units across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Wynne,

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.

NWIHP at national level are not aware of any situation where additional staff was provided to neonatal intensive care units. The Neonatal Intensive Care Units around the country are staffed with a sufficient number and appropriate mix of qualified registered nurses to attend to the emergent and complex care that is required for critical and ill convalescent infants. The availability of parents or other family members are not factored into or bear upon this staffing requirement

The Model of Care for Neonatal Services Ireland (2015) recommends the following Nurse to Cot ratios for Neonatal Services across the country. Intensive Care Units - one registered nurse to one infant. High Dependency Units - one registered nurse to two infants; and Special Care Baby Units - one registered nurse to four infants. Care is not only provided by registered nurses but also by a multidisciplinary team including consultants, NCHDs, allied health professionals etc. The level of care required by neonates in any neonatal unit varies day to day depending on the clinical needs of individual neonates as they are admitted and discharged.

Parents of critical and ill convalescent infants were give parental access to the neonatal intensive care units during the pandemic however as you referenced this access had to be limited so as to ensure the safety of vulnerable new-born infants.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

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