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Deputy Róisín Shortall
Dail Eireann,
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Dublin 2.

20th July 2022

PQ Number: 37490/22

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health if a dedicated funding allocation for the development of the inpatient mental health support mother-and-baby unit has been agreed; if not, when he expects to announce this allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Róisín Shortall

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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.

There are no MBUs available in Ireland at present. Planning for Ireland's first MBU, to be located in St. Vincent's Health Campus, Dublin, is currently underway. This is in line with recommendations made in the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Model of Care for Ireland (HSE, 2017) and the National Maternity Strategy (DOH, 2016). A Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) is a specialist inpatient unit for women who have severe mental health problems, where the mother and baby can be admitted together. MBUs provide specialist care for mothers with an existing mental health problem that has become much worse during pregnancy or after birth and for mothers who develop severe mental health problems for the first time during pregnancy or in the first postnatal year.

MBUs specialise in treating severe mental illness. These include Bipolar Affective Disorder, Schizophrenia, Postpartum Psychosis and other psychotic illnesses. A mother can also be admitted for treatment of severe Depression or Anxiety Disorders, such as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. For this reason it is important to note that MBUs need to be co-located with an adult mental health unit. MBUs typically admit women in late pregnancy and at any point until their baby is one year old. They are calm, welcoming places that are more homely than other wards. Each mother should have their own bedroom, with a cot for the baby. A nursery is also part of the required schedule of accommodation in an MBU. The entrance to the unit is controlled by staff to ensure the safety of mothers and babies. MBUs will work closely with community mental health teams, specialist perinatal mental health teams, maternity services and public health nurses.

The MBU is part of HSE CHO6 Department of Psychiatry located on the campus of St. Vincent's Hospital. This reflects its primary purpose of treating mothers with severe mental illness whilst not separating them from their babies. To date CHO6 Mental Health Services had convened a group comprised of HSE Estates, CHO6 Mental Health, the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services and representatives from St. Vincent's Hospital.

A joint business case was developed and agreed within the group. It was then to go to the Executive Management Team of St. Vincent's Hospital for review. The current Adult Mental Health Unit on the grounds of St. Vincent's Health Campus may need to be repurposed or a new building built at a different location on site if it's to accommodate an Adult Mental Health Team and a Mother and Baby Unit.

More information on what an MBU is can be seen here:

What is an MBU?

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/mentalhealth/what-is-a-mother-and-baby-unit-mbu.pdf>

There has been real progress in filling posts in the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health sector over the last number of years since the Model of Care launch in November 2017. Funding for the service began in 2018 and posts were filled as quickly as possible following funding availability. All Hub and Spoke services are reportedly extremely busy demonstrating an unmet need for this service nationally.

Although a large number of posts have been filled nationally adequate clinical space in particular for teams to see women in maternity hospitals remains challenging. This unfortunately is an issue for 5 out of 6 Hub sites and is particularly severe in the HSE maternity hospital hub sites that is, in UMHL, GUH and CUMH. In Galway University Hospital this is limiting the number of patients the team can see and also limiting the services offered where no new postnatal patients can be seen though there is a full team in place due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure.

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,



Dr Amir Niazi
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