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27th September 2022

Deputy Connolly
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 42999/22: To ask the Minister for Health the organisation structures and rationales of groups (details supplied) within the HSE; if he will confirm the person or body that has oversight over each of these groups; if he will outline to whom each of these groups are accountable; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Details Supplied: (i) National Oversight Group for HSE Homebirth Service, (ii) The National Women and Infants Health Programme, (iii) the Obstetric Event Support Team (OEST), (iv) the National Health Investigation Unit;

Dear Deputy Connolly,

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 National Women and Infants Health Programme

The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) was established in 2017, as a unit within the Acute Hospital Division. With effect from the 2nd of September 2019, the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) moved to the Office of the Chief Clinical Officer (CCO). The primary purpose of the NWIHP is to oversee and drive the implementation of National Maternity Strategy. However since its inception, the remit of the NWIHP has expanded to include neonatology, gynaecology, fertility, termination of pregnancy and sexual assault and treatment services in addition to being a major collaborative partner with the Women's Health Taskforce in the Department of Health. The Programme Director of NWIHP reports directly to the Chief Clinical Officer in the HSE.

The Obstetric Event Support Team (OEST)

In line with the National Maternity Strategy the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) continues to promote and initiate high quality maternity healthcare which is safe, evidence-based, appropriate, timely, efficient, effective and equitable.

The Obstetric Event Support Team (OEST) is a venture by the NWIHP which looks at adverse events in maternity services with a focus on learning. The OEST forms part of the NWIHPs Quality & Safety Framework. Phase 1 of the OEST was implemented in August 2021 with three hospital groups, with phase 2 being implemented in April 2022 and extending to all hospitals. The establishment and launch of the OEST was undertaken with the approval and sign off of the HSE's EMT

As set out in the National Maternity Strategy (2016) and cognisant of existing HSE policies and procedures in the area of quality and risk, the OEST engages with hospitals for the purpose of providing support and harvesting learning. By engaging with maternity services immediately following the occurrence of an adverse event, the OEST can offer another set of eyes and make recommendations to the maternity team on areas of focus for the review. Additionally by engagement with the sites, the OEST can offer peer support and counsel to colleagues on the front line.

The NWIHP OEST consists of an Obstetrician, Midwife and Quality and Safety Manager, all are NWIHP staff and report directly to the Programme Director of NWIHP.

Currently the OEST engages with a site when one of four incidents occurs, these are:

- a) Maternal death
- b) Intrapartum fetal death
- c) Early neonatal death
- d) Babies requiring therapeutic hypothermia

National Oversight Group for HSE Homebirth Service

In line with the National Maternity Strategy, the HSE Homebirth Service transitioned from Community Operations to Acute Operation thereby enabling greater integration with acute maternity services, with specific reference to their supported care pathway. The National Oversight Group for the HSE Homebirth Service was established to oversee and facilitate this transition and comprises of representatives from a number of areas / functions of the HSE including Acute Operations, Hospital Group executive, NWIHP, clinical and midwifery professionals etc. This Group is under the governance of the HSE's Acute Operations and is chaired by the National Director of Acute Operations.

The National Health Investigation Unit

The National Investigations Unit (NIU) provides a unified, independent national service with the expertise to undertake the investigative process under each of the three polices within its remit. While the NIU is independent in the exercise of its day to day investigative functions it remains subject to the normal management and governance structures of the HSE in terms of its administrative functions. Therefore, it is managed by a General Manger who reports to an Assistant National Director of Human Resource who, in turn, reports to the National Director of Human Resources. However, when a complaint is referred to the NIU for investigation, the local manager remains the 'commissioner' of the process, and the management of that complaint primarily rest with the Commissioning Manager. The NIU is a support or facilitation service available to the Commissioning Manager
I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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