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Deputy Mark Ward,
Dail Eireann,
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Dublin 2.

29th September 2022

PQ Number: 43846/22

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the plans that the HSE has to increase the level of psychiatry supports as recommended by the Women's Health Task Force to the 13 perinatal mental health spoke units across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter - Mark Ward.

Dear Deputy Ward,

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 Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Programme (SPMHS) Model of Care was launched in November 2017. It is based on the maternity networks recommended in the National Maternity Strategy and aligned to hospital groups, developed in a 6 hub and 13 spoke format with all 19 maternity services included. Staffing for Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services increased from 4.0WTE (2017) to approximately 74.0WTE nationally (2022).

Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services (SPMHS) are led by a Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist who has specific perinatal mental health training to support women usually with moderate to severe mental health problems who require this service.

In each Hospital Group, the maternity hospital/unit with the highest number of births is designated the hub site for that hospital group and hosts a specialist perinatal multidisciplinary mental health team led by a consultant perinatal psychiatrist. The other maternity services in each hospital group are designated spoke sites. Both hub and spoke sites have been augmented with a perinatal mental health midwife to ensure women with mild-moderate mental health problems receive a skilled response. The response to women in spoke sites with moderate to severe problems is provided by the existing liaison psychiatry service with the specialist teams providing for such women in the hub sites.

The hub specialist team is linked to its spokes and provides education, advice and second opinions.

Phase II of the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service:

The National Model of Care was developed in 2016 and launched in 2017 and based on limited data available on the number of women who may have mental health problems in pregnancy and the first postpartum year. The implementation of the Model of Care has been successful in the recruitment and training of staff as funding became available. A recent review by the Clinical Lead indicates there are a number of areas that will need additional investment specifically additional perinatal mental health supports for spoke sites.

1. A need has been identified for additional Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrists in some hub sites specifically to support their spoke perinatal mental health midwives and liaison psychiatry colleagues.

In 2021 the National Women's Taskforce allocated funding for a 0.4WTE consultant perinatal psychiatrist to enable reconfiguration of the Galway Perinatal Psychiatry input from 0.6WTE to 1.0WTE full-time post. This will enable the psychiatrist to provide one session (1/2 day per week) to each of the Saolta Hospital Group Spoke Sites (Letterkenny, Mayo, Sligo, Portlincula) through the medium of video enabled care (VEC). The time will be used to provide clinical supervision for the spoke perinatal mental health midwives, advice for liaison psychiatry colleagues and virtual second opinions for women attending these spoke sites.

Additional consultant perinatal psychiatrists are considered for National Maternity Hospital, Rotunda Hospital and Cork University Maternity Hospital to provide similar augmented spoke site supports. In some level III hospitals there are no dedicated liaison psychiatry services available and this impacts adversely the support available for perinatal mental health midwives.

2. A Model of Care for Liaison Psychiatry Services in Ireland is currently in development. The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Programme has recommended that all level III hospitals have a liaison psychiatry service providing both inpatient and outpatient support for up to one year for women with mental health problems in the perinatal period.

For more information on the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service please see the following link <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/specialist-perinatal-mental-health/>

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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Clinical Design and Innovation
Health Service Executive