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30th April 2024

Deputy Fitzpatrick
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 16430/24: To ask the Minister for Health whether the TOP Service Improvement Group considered an article published in the Irish Medical Journal on 21 March 2024 which detailed the case of a woman in Limerick whose life was threatened following the performance of a medical abortion whilst she had an undetected ectopic pregnancy within the context of its second identified workstream "early pregnancy ultrasound"

Dear Deputy Fitzpatrick,

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 Termination of Pregnancy, Service Improvement Group, was established to oversee and lead on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the 2022 Reviews of Termination of Pregnancy Services. The Early Pregnancy workstream will evaluate the access to and quality of early pregnancy TOP scanning services. The TOP SIG will not discuss specific, individual cases and it is not anticipated that there will be a change in relation to current guidance regarding ultrasound in early medical abortion.

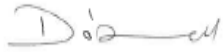
Neither the World Health Organisation (WHO), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ACOG) nor the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) guidelines recommend the routine use of ultrasound in early medical abortion (EMA) where the gestation of the pregnancy is less than 69 days. Ectopic pregnancies are rare in women presenting for termination of pregnancy. The value of routine ultrasound in excluding ectopic pregnancy in symptom-free women without significant risk factors has been found to be questionable as it may aid detection of some cases but may provide false reassurance that a pregnancy is intrauterine and increase the risk of complications.

As stated in the IOG Interim Clinical Guidance on Termination of pregnancy under 12 weeks, if a certifying doctor has concerns that history or examination finding may suggest an ectopic pregnancy or a gestational age of more than 9 weeks, an ultrasound should be performed. The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) in consultation with the IOG is overseeing a significant programme of work on the development and revision of Clinical Practice Guidelines in Maternity and Obstetrics.

An ambitious programme of work has been set out and a new guideline process has been developed. As part of this work, a new Clinical Practice Guideline on Termination of Pregnancy; and Ectopic Pregnancy will be developed later this year. As with all NWIHP clinical practice guidelines, the guideline development process will include a multidisciplinary Expert Advisory Group, appointed at the outset to review guidelines prior to publication.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Davinia O'Donnell, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme