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Deputy Lawless
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 45789/25: To ask the Minister for Health the national standards that maternity hospitals follow in relation to bereavement care following pregnancy loss and perinatal death; the staffing requirements outlined in these standards including whether bereavement midwife posts must be full-time or part-time; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Lawless,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position on the various areas and issues you raised.

Providing bereavement care is an integral part of a maternity service. It is important that such bereavement care is integrated with the hospital's overall medical and clinical care response to parents. All families have bereavement care needs. These needs are viewed as ascending from basic to more complex needs. Bereavement Care is often described in terms of three levels and it is important that the maternity setting has staff who can assess needs at each of these levels, provide care and/or refer to the most appropriate support." National Standards for Care Following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death, Version 2; July 2022.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/national-reports-on-womens-health/national-standards-for-bereavement-care-following-pregnancy-loss-and-perinatal-death.pdf>

The Standards do not outline the staffing requirements, as bereavement teams are comprised of different people in each maternity unit.

However, it was recognised by the HSE in 2016, when the first version of the Standards was published, that Clinical Midwife /Nurse Specialists in Bereavement (CMS/CNS) play a vital role in supporting bereaved parents and in coordinating bereavement care. Additional funding was given then to ensure a bereavement CMS/CNS in each unit (there were 6.5 WTE in post). Each unit was given funding for 1 WTE (with five of the bigger units receiving funding for more posts over time). As of September this year, 18 of the 19 units have a CMS/CNS in post. (Paybill from 2016, including business case attached).

The Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, has recruited someone into the post but is waiting for them to be released into the role. In Cavan Hospital, the CMS is working 0.5 in bereavement and 0.5 in TOP services. In the Midlands Regional Hospital, Portlaoise, the CNS is on long-term sick leave, and despite advertising it, they have not managed to fill the position.

Due to staffing shortages, I know some medium and small units redeploy the CMS/CNS for some hours each week.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

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