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14th July 2020

Deputy Feighan
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 13021/20 To ask the Minister for Health the plans in place to assist expecting parents with classes online in the absence of physical antenatal class appointments being offered due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Feighan,

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.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges it presented from a safety perspective regarding the provision of antenatal classes in the normal face to face fashion, the HSE have put in place a significant programme of work to ensure to the maximum extent possible expectant parents continue to have access to the range of information and supports that they need.

In addition to all expectant parents continuing to receive the HSE's "My Pregnancy" book at their booking in clinic, and being directed to the HSE's on-line information regarding antenatal care and information on mychild.ie, maternity services around the country have established on-line antenatal education programmes and resources for women and their partners.

This work was co-ordinated at national level within the HSE by its Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director (ONMSD). A forum of providers of antenatal education around the country was established to work together to provide national on-line antenatal educational resources whilst supporting and enabling more local delivery of education. The maintenance of direct interaction with women and their partners was considered an essential element in the provision of classes during the isolating times of Covid-19.

This forum enabled antenatal educators to get together nationally and share ideas and learning, providing an opportunity to debrief on unique challenges providers were experiencing during the pandemic. It also gave educators the opportunity to share information and advice on how to provide antenatal education online, including technology platforms, the experience for attendees and how to manage registration.

Examples of developments undertaken to date in maternity services around the country in this area include virtual classes, virtual hospital tours, on-line Q&A sessions, video clips, infant feeding classes, parent-education classes for inpatient women post birth and one to one virtual classes/conversation.

Furthermore, the 'antenatal classes' guide on mychild.ie was also updated to include signposting to online resources and courses available for people who are pregnant and their partners.

The forum continues to meet monthly and will expand to Primary Health Networks so as to continue work in this key area of maternity care, with the newly published National Standards for Antenatal Education in Ireland 2020 providing a guiding focus for this work.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



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