



INSTITUTE OF OBSTETRICIANS & GYNAECOLOGISTS

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND**

Opening statement

Prof Louise Kenny, Professor of Obstetrics at University College Cork, a Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at Cork University Maternity Hospital.

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My colleagues and I welcome the National Maternity Strategy and sincerely hope that it will be adequately resourced and introduced without further delay.

There are fundamental inequities in the provision of women's health care in Ireland in 2017.

Firstly, Ireland has lowest number of obstetricians and gynaecologists among the OECD countries, at a rate of just 3.95 per 1,000 live births. This is just over half the number of UK consultant obstetrician and gynaecologists for the same number of births, but despite this, clinical outcomes for mothers and infants are comparable with the best internationally.

We urgently need to recruit a minimum of 100 extra consultants.

This will require remedial steps to retain our senior trainee specialists, who are currently discouraged from remaining in Ireland by poor working conditions, the perception of a hostile media and gross inequality of remuneration and contracted hours inflicted by the introduction of the divisive 2012 Consultant Contract.

Secondly, we once again reiterate the need for equal access for all women to standardised ultrasound services.

At the current time, neither specialist ultrasound nor fetal medicine services are available to all pregnant women in the Republic of Ireland. Even in Cork University Maternity Hospital (CUMH), a tertiary level referral unit, where over 8000 infants were born in 2016, we cannot provide second trimester fetal anomaly scanning for the majority of pregnant women attending for antenatal care. This issue remains unresolved in 2017 and exposes pregnant women attending CUMH, as well as their health care providers, to an unacceptable level of risk.

Finally, the most single important step to safeguard the success of the National Maternity Strategy is to ensure that the governance of women's health services is robust, independent and secure.

International experience demonstrates that women's health services are always the first to be cut when they are not protected by independent governance and a ring-fenced budget. Closer to home, the well documented issues with provision of gynaecology services in CUMH, which have led to unprecedented and dangerously long waiting times for outpatient and surgical treatment, further illustrate this point.

We believe that in keeping with the National Maternity Strategy, maternity services within the Irish hospital system need to be led a single accountable individual with both clinical and executive authority.

Prof Louise Kenny is a Professor of Obstetrics at University College Cork, a Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at Cork University Maternity Hospital and the founding Director of the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) funded Irish Centre for Fetal and Neonatal Translational Research (INFANT). Prof Kenny trained in the NHS in the UK, where she also worked as a Consultant before moving to Ireland 10 years ago. She has raised over €30 million in peer reviewed research grants and has published over 200 original scientific research papers largely related to adverse pregnancy outcome.