

Perinatal Palliative Care

Q1. What is perinatal palliative care?

“Palliative care for the foetus, neonate or infant with life limiting conditions is an active and total approach to care, from the point of diagnosis or recognition, throughout the child’s life, death and beyond. It embraces physical, emotional, social and spiritual elements and focuses on the enhancement of quality of life for the [neonatal infant] and support for the family. It includes the management of distressing symptoms [provision of short breaks] and care through death and bereavement.” ACT 2009

Perinatal palliative care is an active, total, holistic approach to care, focused on enhancing the quality of life of the baby and their family while recognising potential or inevitable death, and should be offered from the time of diagnosis, whether before birth (antenatally) or as a newborn (neonatally).

It can be thought of as “hospice in the womb” (including [birth planning](#), emotional support for the family, and preliminary medical decision-making before the baby is born) as well as more traditional hospice and palliative care at home after birth (if the baby lives longer than a few minutes or hours). It includes essential newborn care such as warmth, comfort, and nutrition. Palliative care can also include medical treatments intended to improve the baby's life. This approach supports families through the rest of the pregnancy, through decision-making before and after birth, and through their grief. Perinatal hospice also enables families to make meaningful plans for the baby's life, birth, and death,

honouring the baby as well as the baby's family

Q2. How common is perinatal death in Ireland?

There is an average of 60-70,000 births in Ireland every year, and unfortunately, 7 in every 1,000 pregnancies are complicated by perinatal death.

Q3. Is Perinatal Hospice a place?

Perinatal hospice is not a place. It is a model of care, an extra layer of support that can be incorporated into standard pregnancy and birth care. Ideally, it is a comprehensive and multidisciplinary team approach that can include obstetricians, midwives, neonatologists, Neonatal ICU staff, general practitioners, public health nurses, community based palliative care teams, chaplains, social workers and others.

Perinatal palliative care requires effective multidisciplinary teamwork, whether delivered in the inpatient setting or in the community. With appropriate support, end-of-life care can be delivered in the community.

References:

ACT The Association for Children with life-threatening and terminal conditions and their families UK

Perinatal palliative care in Ireland highlighted at the Rotunda Hospital 15th February 2017
www.rotunda.ie

www.perinatalhospice.org

McMahon et al. Referrals to a perinatal specialist palliative care consult service in Ireland, 2012-2015. [arch dis child fetal neonatal ed.](#) 2017 Nov 9. pii