Birth of a new era for Mother

By PATRICIA FEENHY

A TOUCH of luxury, as well as a whole new choice of procedures for expectant mothers, has been added to Limerick’s maternity facilities with the opening this week of the new labour ward at the Regional Maternity Hospital.

The new facility includes the first purpose-built home birthing suite to go into service in an Irish maternity hospital, and the only counselling department in any such hospital.

The refurbishing and reequipping of the labour suite cost €450,000, financed by a Department of Health capital grant.

The hospital is the largest of its kind in the country outside Dublin, and is among the top ten in Europe.

Its perinatal mortality rate is particularly low, and is 2.5% better than the national average.

Its neonatal unit is one of the best equipped in the country, and health board chiefs are now fighting for the appointment of a neonatologist, an associate professor according to consultant paediatrician Dr Liam Carroll, would improve standards and have an impact on neonatal survival rates.

The equipping of the new counselling department, staffed by Nurse Cathy Quinn from Kinsale, was paid for by private donations and a £6,000 fundraising campaign by Carmel O’Callaghan of Ennis, who organised 24 other mothers in a sponsored climb of Croagh Patrick last summer.

The deputy director of nursing at the hospital, Nora Fitzpatrick, said: “Choice is the whole concept now, and we reckon that there is nothing we can’t offer.”

The new home birthing room in particular Mrs Fitzpatrick described as “one up for the mid-West.”

It’s the first such unit in the country, and will be after assessment, who wants to avail of it. Here it is hoped that babies will be born without any intervention.

It has a relaxed, luxurious and totally unclinical ambience, with TV, tea-making facilities and even a CD player.

But hidden behind the tasteful presses and ornament-filled shelves are all the up-to-date medical aids, in case of complications.

It will be available without distinction to both public and private patients, health board CEO Denis Doherty said, and will involve no extra charge to the patient.

There were only six requests for home births out of 3,372 babies born in the hospital last year but Ms Fitzpatrick said they expect this to increase when mothers become aware of the new service.

Mrs Fitzpatrick said that all mothers will be able to design a birth plan during pregnancy knowing that the facility of a “home from home” atmosphere will be available.

The mother will be able to see her birth plans worked out at the antenatal clinic come to fruition, “and overall it should be a uniquely satisfying experience for the mother, her family and the midwife,” Ms Fitzpatrick added.

She said that everything possible had been done to “bustle regimentation”.

“The days when a woman reported in to a maternity hospital and was ordered straight away to bed are over,” the deputy chief nursing officer said.

And all this is only the beginning.

The next phase in transforming the hospital into a facility of which the mothers of the Mid-West can be proud will involve upgrading all wards, adding en-suite facilities to all rooms and wards, and improving the outpatients and ante-natal care departments.

In one of the Delivery Suites at the Regional Maternity Hospital this week (from left), Sr. Margaret Brennan, Highfield; Sr. Hannah O’Brien, Cappamore and Sr. Monica Ryan, Clareview.

Picture: OWEN SOUTH (LL)