**£300,000 baby hospital upgrading is completed**

This week saw the completion of Phase II of the major £300,000 upgrading of the Regional Maternity hospital.

It is the largest maternity unit in the State outside of the three major hospitals in Dublin, and is, in fact, among the ten largest maternity units in Europe.

The hospital was built in the late 1950s and is in operation since October 1960 as a 60-bed unit. This was subsequently increased to 80 beds in 1969. In its first full year of operation in 1961, there were 1,576 births, reaching a peak in 1980 when 3,162 babies were born during a 12-month period.

The baby boom has dropped since, and in 1992, 3,572 babies were born in the hospital.

Phase I, the complete upgrading and refurbishing of the labour ward and operating theatre, was completed last March, and Phase II saw the reopening of Ward M1, a 23-bedded post-natal ward consisting of single rooms, two-bed rooms and four-bed rooms.

While all staff working in the hospital are justifiably proud of the service they provide, there are obviously a number of deficiencies in the building itself.

With bathroom facilities, particularly on post-natal wards, badly in need of upgrading to bring the hospital to the required standard for the 1990s, the introduction of bathrooms en-suite to each single, two-bedded and four-bedded room is a welcome improvement.

With all furniture and furnishings, beds, lockers, wardrobes, floor coverings, curtains also being replaced throughout the wards, plus the added facility of satellite TV, patient comforts have improved considerably.

In addition to the improved accommodation, the development of a very impressive and strategically positioned nursing station has been welcomed by all staff, while planning for the development of the outpatient department is well advanced, with work due to commence early in the new year.

Phase II was funded through a capital grant from the Department of Health.
Birth of a new era for Mother

By PATRICIA FEEHILY

A TOUCn 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 re-equipping 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 neo-natal unit is one of the best equipped in the country, and health board chiefs are now fighting for the appointment of a neonatologist, an appointment

The equipping of the new counselling department, staffed by Nurse Cathy Quinn from Kinvara, was paid for by private donations and a £6,500 fundraising campaign by Carmel O'Callaghan of Ennis, who organised 24 other mothers in a sponsored climb of Crough Patrick last summer.

The deputy director of 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 offered to any mother, 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 ornamented shelves are all the most 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 3,572 babies born in the hospital last year but Ms Fitzpatrick said they expect this to increase when mothers become aware of the new service.

Ms 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 ante-natal 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 "banish 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 antenatal care departments.
Patients like our hospitals

**FROM P1**

Money for hospitals

ALMOST £1m will be made available to acute hospitals in the region to enable them to replace or purchase necessary equipment, in the coming year. Fethard Minister Michael Noonan has announced.

The biggest funding, £300,000, is for St John’s. This is followed by £290,000, for the Regional in Dooradoyle, and £110,000 for Ennis General. Croom will receive £90,000, Nenagh 60,000, and the Regional Maternity Hospital £50,000.

The biggest recipient will be St John’s, which will receive £1m over the next 12 months.

New jobs at Syntex

SYNTEX Ireland Ltd have announced that 30 new jobs will be created in their pharmaceutical plant at Clarecastle in the next 12 months.

The new project is being undertaken without grant assistance, and involves a company investment of £4.5m.

This will bring total investment in the Clarecastle plant to £50m, and the workforce total to 500.

Paul on Irish team

LIMERICK cyclist, Paul Roland, has been selected on the Irish team which will compete in the World Road Race this weekend. Paul has been showing impressive form during the past season and spent two weeks competing in France last April.

Russell Park litter problem

THE littered state of Russell Park, Barrington’s Pier, donated to the city by Freeman Ted Russell is a poor reflection of the appreciation of the gift, according to Cllr Tim Leddin.

"The park is continuously covered with litter and in an unkept state," he claimed.

According to Cllr Leddin, there are "only a couple of small litter bins" in the park which are totally inadequate to cater for the needs of people who frequently use the park to walk or just relax.

"Anyway they are always overflowing with rubbish," Cllr Leddin has called on the Corporation to place an adequate number of suitable sized bins around the park, which was donated to the city by Mr Russell in the late 1950’s.

"I think the Corporation should have a warder travelling around checking amenity areas as part of their environmental awareness programme," he suggested.

Flower Power

THE July meeting of the Limerick Flower and Garden Club will take place on Tuesday next, July 11, at the Youth Centre in Lower Glentrae Street, from 8 pm.

Demonstration and instruction by club members.

No meeting in August owing to holidays.

Annual Show in Jury’s Hotel on Tuesday, September 19.
**PROFILE 1993 – REGIONAL MATERNITY HOSPITAL LIMERICK**

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**SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY 1993**

- No. of In-Patients Treated 5,408
- No. of Out-Patient Clinics Held 196
- No. of Out-Patients Treated - New 2,245
  - Return 11,444
- No. of Live Births 3,464
- No. of X-Ray Examinations 6,854

**NO. OF STAFF (W.T.E.)**

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**EXPENDITURE 1993**

(ESTIMATED)

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