SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE:

THE CURIOUS CASE OF OUR SMALLEST PATIENTS

RESEARCHERS at the University of Limerick are working with the Environmental Protection Agency on assessing the environmental impacts of infant feeding.

The research team, Dr Yvonne Ryan-Fogarty, Postdoctoral Researcher, and Dr Bernadette O'Regan, as Principal Investigator, are keen to pour their collective experience into the research.

"We need to start assessing how policy at all levels can provide a more integrated approach in addressing environmental problems" says Dr O'Regan. "Backcasting is an incredibly useful tool in the fulfilment of this aim."

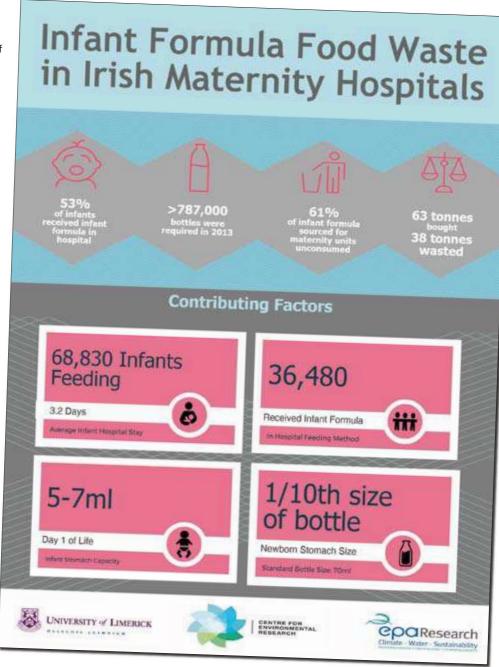
The research team used key health and waste management polices to develop solutions. In particular the WHO Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding and HSE Infant Feeding Policy for Maternity and Neonatal Units are crucial to waste prevention.

"This analysis provided thoughtprovoking results. The problem orientation phase showed that 61pc of ready to use breastmilk substitutes purchased are unconsumed and end up as waste," said Dr Ryan-Fogarty.

"We developed 14 alternative solutions for prevention and management of this waste. Some of the solutions are already key health promotion goals, for example increasing breastfeeding rates, while others are innovative in terms of seeking new opportunities for waste prevention."

"Participation in the Baby Friendly
Health initiative (BFHI) is HSE
policy for maternity units. The
BFHI aims to provide a protective
environment for all babies and their mothers
and this includes awareness and skills for
parents and health workers if a baby is
receiving human milk substitutes," explained
Dr Genevieve Becker, National Coordinator of
the BFHI in Ireland. Therefore the research
outcomes were strengthened by the inclusion
of Baby Friendly Health Initiative criterion in the
evaluation of potential solutions.

Preliminary data collection from University of Limerick Maternity Hospital and Cork University Maternity Hospital has begun. ULMH



was recently presented with an award to acknowledge its continued commitment to the Baby Friendly Health Initiative.

Achieving Baby Friendly status is called for in Healthy Ireland, the National Maternity Strategy, HSE Infant Feeding Policy, HSE Breastfeeding Action Plan and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children report on Ireland. Infant feeding methods directly impact on the lifetime health of the infant.

For further information log onto the project website: https://ecoinfantresearch.wordpress.

com/ and Baby Friendly Health initiative in Ireland: http://www. babyfriendly.ie.

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