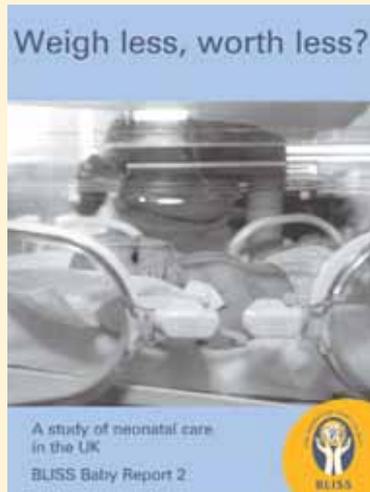


Deepening crisis in the care of premature babies

Twelve months after the first BLISS report "Special care for sick babies – choice or chance?" revealed that neonatal units were struggling to cope with demand, a second report entitled "Weigh less, worth less?" shows that the situation is worse than the previous year. The numbers of babies needing neonatal care is increasing – with one in eight babies, approximately 80,000 a year, requiring some form of special care and 18,000 needing intensive care.

The report shows that on average 78% of all units had to close to new admissions at least once in the last six months, compared to 72% last year. For level 3 units the figure was 90%, up 10% on last year. This means that a large number of babies were transferred out of network in order to receive the care they needed. On average three babies a day were transferred out of network, the majority occurring because no cot was available locally. These transfers are clearly distressing for parents – 14% had to travel more than 30 miles a day to see their baby and 10% had to pay more than £20 a day to travel.

Level 1 units are now caring for intensive care babies although they are not equipped to do so. The report shows that 50% of SCBUs were forced to accept intensive care babies, an increase of 10%



on last year. Despite recommendations by BAPM that intensive care babies should receive one to one care, only 3% of the 216 units surveyed were operating at the recommended ratio. A report published by the NHS in 2000 showed that premature babies nursed in units that were frequently close to capacity were 50% more likely to die than those cared for in units with less patients.

The BLISS report concludes by recommending that the DOH should make the achievement of one to one nursing for babies in intensive care mandatory. Furthermore the Payment by Result tariff should not be based on current average funding, but be adjusted to allow neonatal units to provide appropriate care.

The full report can be accessed on www.bliss.org.uk

Raising awareness of meningitis

Following a study of 3,235 people which revealed that half of parents surveyed could not name three symptoms of meningitis, a website has been developed by the Meningitis Trust, to raise awareness of the disease among parents and children.

The website, www.meningitis-learning.org, features a section specifically for parents to increase their understanding of the disease by answering the most commonly asked questions, including those about vaccines.

Philip Kirby, Chief Executive for the Meningitis Trust, said: "Meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia can affect anyone at any time and can kill within hours. Survivors can be left with severe, disabling after-effects."

Children are particularly susceptible to



meningitis and every year there are at least 1,500 reported cases in the under 16s, although experts estimate that there are actually twice as many cases in the UK. In addition to raising awareness of meningitis and septicaemia, the Meningitis Trust offers practical support for life to people coping with the devastating after-effects.

www.meningitis-learning.org

A new structure for the NHS

Following a reorganisation, the number of strategic health authorities (SHAs) has been cut from 28 to 10 and the existing 29 ambulance trusts have merged into 12 bodies. The number of primary care trusts (PCTs) in England is also set to fall from 303 to 152. The changes are designed to ensure that services are shaped around patients' needs by helping NHS bodies to implement changes such as practice based commissioning, patient choice and payment by results.

In the new structure, SHAs will take strategic leadership of local health systems, managing the performance of PCTs. The reforms are intended to give staff more opportunities to improve care, influence the way services are run and improve their own career paths. New services will mean more opportunities for nurses to work in the community and take on new and extended roles.

The changes are projected to save around £250 million by 2008 by cutting the duplication of administration roles, with reinvestment in frontline services.

Changes to national childhood immunisation programme

A number of changes are being made to the programme of immunisation that babies receive in the first year of life, the most significant being the inclusion of vaccination against pneumococcal diseases such as meningitis, septicaemia and pneumonia. Currently approximately 50 children under the age of five die from serious pneumococcal diseases each year in the UK, while many more are left with permanent disabilities.

From September 2006 the pneumococcal vaccine Prevenar (Wyeth) will be included in the UK national childhood immunisation programme and will be given to babies at 2, 4 and 13 months. There will also be a catch-up programme to cover all children up to 2 years of age.

In order to support healthcare professionals involved in advising parents about immunisation, Wyeth Vaccines has developed a 'toolkit' with a wealth of information. The toolkit is available online and includes background information, the new childhood vaccination schedule, a step-by-step guide to vaccine administration and advice on communicating with parents.

www.prevenar.co.uk

Move to improve services for breast feeding mothers

The UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, which sets standards of care around infant feeding, has been upheld by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) as the minimum level of care which maternity units should provide. Furthermore, according to a costing report released by NICE, working towards Baby Friendly status would start to show cost savings after only three years due to reduced childhood illnesses (gastroenteritis, asthma and middle-ear infection) as a result of the projected increase in breast feeding levels.

Many new mothers who want to breast feed give up because they find it painful or because they are told they are not producing enough milk, leaving them feeling inadequate and resulting in the

baby missing out on the invaluable benefits of breast feeding.

Many midwives and health visitors have had little or no training in teaching how to breast feed and so problems of latching on and failure to feed on demand are common. Given the right advice from the start by trained health professionals, breast feeding should be a painless experience, and problems with milk supply rarely occur.

The NICE postnatal guidelines require all healthcare providers (hospitals and community) to “implement an externally evaluated structured programme that encourages breast feeding, using the Baby Friendly Initiative as a minimum.”

Full postnatal guidelines and costing report, contact NICE on 020 7067 5800

Infant & Toddler Forum aims to improve nutrition

Recent government initiatives have increased the pressure on health and childcare professionals to offer high quality, evidence-based guidance to parents on how to feed their children. To help meet the need for information on the nutrition of children aged one to three, The Forum on Infant and Toddler Nutrition and Development has been formed.



While there is an abundance of advice for new mothers on feeding their newborn babies, there is a dearth of information once the child has been weaned. Parents are rarely given advice about healthy eating for toddlers, and often left to cope with issues such as the introduction of new foods, food refusal and allergies. Health and childcare professionals can feel ill-equipped to offer guidance.

The Forum is a multidisciplinary group of experts with first-hand experience in child nutrition, and is committed to offering practical guidance on how to ensure toddlers receive a full and balanced diet. A goal of the Forum is to improve the access for health professionals to reliable, evidence-based nutritional information relevant to their practice, which will equip them to advise parents of infants and young children.

The educational programme of the Infant & Toddler Forum includes detailed factsheets, study days and a comprehensive website.

www.infantandtoddlerforum.org

Supporting life-limited children and their families

A major project to determine what and where the service gaps are in children's palliative care has been launched. This initiative – the first of its kind – is being jointly undertaken by the Association of Children's Hospices (ACH) and the Association for Children's Palliative Care (ACT).

It is every parent's worst nightmare to be told their child will die before them, but for an estimated 20,000 families across the UK, this is a reality. Some will die when they're very young, while others will deteriorate slowly over a number of years. In most cases, full-time care falls to the parents – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Not surprisingly the whole family is under huge emotional, physical and financial strain.

Children's palliative care services offer essential free support to families in these situations, providing a total approach to care which includes the child's medical and nursing needs as well as the emotional, social, spiritual, educational and practical support needs of the whole family. Children's palliative care starts from the point of diagnosis and continues throughout the child's life and into bereavement support after the child's death.

Solid evidence is required of where the gaps are in provision so that future services can be strategically planned to ensure all life-limited children in the UK and their



families have awareness of, and access to, a local children's hospice service. The project will run over five years, starting first with a pilot. The first three years have been funded by the True Colours Trust.

Pregnancy helplines launched

To try to allay the natural worries that most new parents and parents-to-be experience, two pregnancy helplines are now available. The Pregnancy and Birth telephone line, launched by the NCT and sponsored by Comfort Pure fabric conditioner, provides confidential information and support about pregnancy and birth issues from experienced and qualified NCT antenatal teachers. Tommy's, the baby charity, also runs a helpline service with a team of midwives on hand to answer any pregnancy-related questions, encouraging awareness of good pregnancy health.

The Pregnancy and Birth helpline is open Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm on 0870 444 8709
Tommy's Pregnancy Helpline available Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm on 0870 777 30 60