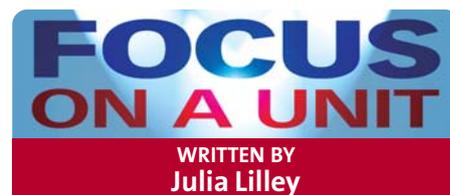


# At the centre of care in Devon and Cornwall



The last three years have seen considerable changes in the neonatal unit at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth. These have been precipitated by the development of the Peninsula Network that has seen Derriford working with the units in Barnstaple, Exeter, Torbay and Truro to streamline and improve the care offered to infants born in Devon and Cornwall. With the only other level 3 centres in Bristol, Plymouth is ideally situated to cater for the needs of the Peninsula. The unit offers specialist services such as ophthalmology and airway surgery. It is hoped that surgical services may expand in the future.

As a level 3 centre, Derriford has seen dramatic changes in staffing and working practices. The number of intensive care cots has been increased to seven, with plans for expansion in the future. Equipment has also been upgraded and at the same time the clinical area has been redeveloped to

echocardiography before discharge home, reassuring parents and reducing emergency readmissions as well as unnecessary out patient follow-up appointments. The neonatologists work in close co-operation with tertiary cardiac specialists, with whom local cardiac follow-up is shared.

A developmental follow-up programme links with local community services and all infants born under 30 weeks have full developmental assessments at two and four years.

The appointment of extra nursing staff has brought in a number of very experienced staff but has also resulted in a significant number of junior nursing staff joining the team with implications for the skill mix on the unit and for training. Senior staff have risen to the challenge, providing support and training. Both junior nursing and medical staff benefit from being based for their training in a unit that offers specialist care for the most

take on projects such as newborn teaching days which are open to all in maternity services and the community. The unit is committed to all five ANNPs being able to prescribe; the first two will complete the prescribing course in early 2008.

As a direct result of the unit's level 3 status the Peninsula Transport Service has been developed. Its evolution was identified by the network as a prerequisite to the centralisation of services. The establishment of a properly funded network transport service means that all infants are now moved in a safe, well supported manner, relieving the stress for units of organising moves at a local level. The service provides care for infants who need to be transferred for more specialist care between hospitals within the peninsula or to other centres out of region. Most transports are undertaken by land but fixed wing aircraft and helicopter have also been deployed. For time critical transports, Devon Air Ambulance has partially funded an air certified transport incubator designed for the EC135 helicopter.

In 2004 the unit became the fifth centre in England to join the Vermont Oxford Network (VON), an international neonatal benchmarking programme allowing the team to compare their outcomes with those of more than 600 other centres worldwide. In 2006, all the Peninsula units enrolled into VON making it the first UK neonatal network to participate in the programme and so judge how it is performing.

A worry for staff was how parents would feel about being moved out of area to deliver in a specialist unit. They have been reassured by overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents who appreciate the care delivered by the Derriford team and value the advantages of a specialist service.

The last few years have not always been easy – changing working patterns have provided a challenging environment. Most staff report that they find the changes stimulating, are proud of the high standard of care they give and are looking forward to changes in the future.



Derriford Hospital's transport and air ambulance team accept delivery of the customised incubator for air transport.

provide a better working environment for staff and a more welcoming one for families.

A team of consultant neonatologists has been appointed to provide expert care to infants at Derriford and specialist advice to the other units in the network. The NICU offers all modes of ventilation as well as providing nitric oxide and total body cooling as regional services. The expertise of the consultants in post also enables the unit to offer a diagnostic cardiac service. For example, infants with asymptomatic murmurs on examination benefit from

vulnerable infants in the region.

Nursing staff have still found the time to develop specialist services. There is an excellent bereavement team which provides support to parents after they have left the unit. All parents are now offered standardised resuscitation training by a team of specially trained and assessed medical and nursing staff. Feedback shows it is greatly appreciated by parents who feel it improves their confidence and peace of mind on being discharged home.

Five ANNPs support clinical work and

## Is your unit special?

Why not contribute to our focus on a unit feature?  
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