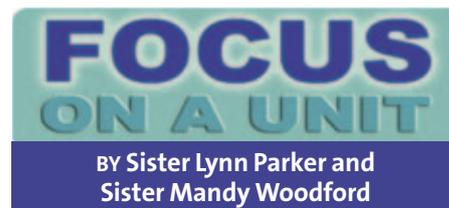


At St Peter's family experience is paramount



The St Peter's maternity unit in Chertsey, Surrey, was opened in 1970. The unit was refurbished when it was designated as the level 3 unit for Surrey in the Kent Surrey and Sussex Network, providing eight intensive care, four high dependency and 12 special care cots. The Duchess of Wessex opened the upgraded NICU in 2005. Since then, another three special care cots have been added in the transitional care unit based on the postnatal ward.

The staff of 60 is divided into five nursing teams working alongside five neonatal consultants. A recent review provided a Matron that is shared with Paediatric Services and a Unit Manager (Band 7). There are six Band 7 nurses, each responsible for a nursing team and supported by a valuable group of ancillary and voluntary staff.

As a tertiary centre, St Peter's unit provides specialist services within the network. High flow therapy (Vapotherm™) for early extubation of extreme preterm babies has been in use for four years. Therapeutic cooling for the treatment of neonatal encephalopathy, cerebral function monitoring (CFM) and nitric oxide therapy are also available. There is a specialist ophthalmologist, supported by one of the Band 6 staff members, providing regular eye tests to babies. Laser eye surgery has been available since 2010 for correction of retinopathy of prematurity.

St Peter's is the base for the Surrey Neonatal Transfer Service providing a 24/7 service with partners based in Kent and Sussex. Many of the qualified neonatal staff rotate onto this team, providing both elective and emergency retrievals throughout the region.

Staff development and advancing practice

Advancing practice is important to the unit. A Practice Development Sister ensures that all new staff are provided with a comprehensive induction package and nursing, midwifery and intensive care students complete their placements in the unit, gaining extensive experience and



Sister and Family Support Nurse Lynn Parker (left) with Sister Mandy Woodford.

feeling well-supported. One of the Band 7 nurses has a dual role as Research Nurse and is currently collating data for the UK necrotising enterocolitis (NEC) study while actively recruiting participants for the Probiotics in Preterm babies Study (PiPS) and Evaluation of preterm images (ePrime). All Band 6 staff take on an area of responsibility such as running the unit's donor breast milk bank, one of 17 in the country providing an invaluable source of nutrition for the tiniest preterm babies.

Nurses of all grades are involved in developing practices that impact on the care of babies and families. Specialist teams currently active on the unit are palliative care, developmental care, pain and skin assessment. The unit has achieved Level 2 in UNICEF's Baby Friendly Initiative and has recently launched the Best Beginnings Small Wonders Change programme.

Family experience

The unit continually strives to develop services in response to the needs of babies and families. Parents are considered partners in care and are involved in care plans that comply with Standard 2 of the Bliss Charter and Care Quality Commission requirements. The lead nurse for documentation has introduced a three-stage questionnaire approach to evaluate parent feedback, which influences how family experiences are improved.

Development of a Neonatal Assessment Process is underway – a care pathway from admission to discharge.

The care provided for families does not finish when they leave the NICU and a Community Neonatal Sister runs a service providing much needed follow-up for fragile babies, including early discharge home – often with oxygen and/or nasogastric tube feeding.

Having recognised the trauma involved in having a very sick or premature baby, the Family Support Nurse dedicates time each week to providing support and counselling for these families. A comprehensive bereavement follow-up and counselling service is offered to families whose babies do not survive. The NHS South East Coast Best of Health Award was awarded in 2009 for Sister Lynn Parker's developments in this service¹.

The experience of families at this difficult stage of life will have an impact on their future health and physical and emotional development. The St Peter's NICU is proud of its staff and their dedication and motivation towards the fragile babies and families under their care.

References

1. Parker L. Mothers' experience of receiving counselling/psychotherapy on a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). *JNN* 2011;17:182-89.