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The importance of family-centred care

At Bliss, we believe in the importance of family-centred care (FCC) as continuous, high quality FCC can lead to positive long-term outcomes not only for the baby and their family, but also for unit staff. FCC is promoted through several programmes of work; through the Baby Charter Audit, Bliss Nurses and Bliss publications.

Bliss looks at FCC as a philosophy of care that helps families with a baby in neonatal care to cope with the stress, anxiety and re-defined parenting roles that accompany their baby's condition. The physical, psychological and social needs of both the baby and their family are therefore placed at the centre of all care given. It is now widely recognised that caring for the whole family is very important and that this can make a positive contribution to the long-term health and wellbeing of the baby¹.

Bliss Nurses delivering family-centred care

One of the most recent projects to support the improved delivery of FCC is the Bliss Nurse. It is the job of the Bliss Nurse to provide parents with practical advice, emotional support and guidance to help them come to terms with the situation and to make well-informed decisions for their child. Bliss Nurses play a pivotal role in the involvement of parents in their child's daily care, which is highly likely to positively affect the long-term health outcomes of that child².

Bliss Nurses also work with their local colleagues to increase a network's understanding of, and commitment to, continuous FCC. They ensure that each unit within their network makes use of the Bliss Baby Charter Audit Tool as a means to assess their current practice, to highlight areas of priority and to draw up and keep track of action planning around FCC.

Bliss aims to support at least 28 Bliss Nurses by 2020 in neonatal units all over the country. We are in the third year of the project and have four nurses in place, covering units in the London, East of England, Northern and the South West Midlands networks. These nurses are integral to driving positive change in practice across each of those networks. To do so successfully, they do not hold clinical duties, but rather focus solely on the quality of FCC provided to parents of premature and sick babies in their network. Bliss Nurses step in once a premature or sick baby has been in their hospital for at least 24 hours so that the family receives key literature and information on available support services.

Bliss publications

Showing parents how they can best hold their baby 'skin-to-skin' is one important aspect of FCC. In order to facilitate the skin-to-skin process, Bliss has recently updated the booklet *Skin-to-Skin With Your Premature Baby*³. The aim of the

booklet is to encourage parents to speak to the health professionals on their units about skin-to-skin contact, while also explaining its benefits. The booklet makes a point of encouraging fathers to practice skin-to-skin contact with their child too.

While the booklet is directed at parents it can also be a valuable tool for health professionals, especially when they are new to the neonatal field or are looking at ways of improving FCC.

Supporting healthcare professionals

Bliss is passionate about supporting healthcare professionals in delivering continuous, excellent care on their unit.

The Bliss Baby Charter sets out best practice levels of care for neonatal units in the UK looking after premature and sick babies². The charter was originally published in 2005 and is based on the seven key principles of Human Rights and the UN Right of the Child⁵. Its content was also developed in light of Principle Three in the Department of Health's Toolkit for High Quality Neonatal Services as well as Poppy recommendations^{1,4}. The charter has evolved with the revised version, published in 2007, containing more detailed information to guide units.

While Bliss received positive feedback, healthcare professionals were looking for support in meeting those standards. Having successfully received funding from the Department of Health's Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund, the Bliss Baby Charter Audit Tool was developed to further support the project.

The audit tool helps neonatal units to examine their services and identify areas for improvement in FCC. The focus is on consistent delivery of a FCC service, as per the Department of Health's Toolkit⁵. Rather than being a tool for external



judgement, the audit is an opportunity for units to highlight areas of excellent care, while giving staff the opportunity to prioritise areas with room for improvement². The audit fits seamlessly into the work of a unit, with the majority of the required data readily available.

The Bliss Baby Charter Audit so far

The audit has been a resounding success. After the initial 10 pilot audits, 32 units completed it in the first year and a further 73 are currently working towards completion. On top of this, 30 units have registered an interest in completing the audit. Some very positive feedback from units has been received:

- The audit has been a way of streamlining or prioritising work streams for single units
- Health professionals have noted that it has allowed them to take a step back, evaluate their work and share knowledge with other units
- The audit has helped to highlight areas of greatest urgency.

Highlighting areas with room for improvement has led to a new initiative – the Best

Practice Bank. Bliss is currently collecting innovative examples of best practice with the aim of publishing them on the Bliss website to share with other units.

Bliss is pleased about the support received from the Department of Health throughout this project. The newest edition of the Service Specifications for England, published by the NHS, lists both the Bliss Baby Charter Audit and the Audit Tool in the publications section⁶.

Bliss Baby Charter Grant Fund

Thanks to a collaboration with the True Colours Trust, Bliss has been able to offer units who have completed the audit either a small (£1,000) or a large (up to £10,000) grant to improve areas highlighted in their audit. The grant has enabled units to make a great difference to their delivery of FCC, by making changes such as ordering a new breast pump or refurbishing family rooms.

What's next?

Bliss is excited to announce that it will be launching the Bliss Family-Centred Accreditation Scheme at the National Action and Good Practice Conference on

20 November 2013. The accreditation scheme will mean that, upon completing the audit, units will be accredited for three years, thereby showing their commitment to delivering continuous, high quality FCC.

References

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2. **Bliss.** *The Bliss Baby Charter Standards* [Online]. Available from: www.bliss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/baby_charter_2011_web.pdf [Accessed: 01 Oct 2013].
3. **Bliss.** *Skin-to-skin with your Premature Baby*. 2013.
4. **Department of Health.** *Toolkit for High Quality Neonatal Services* [Online]. 2009. Available from: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107845 [Accessed: 01 Oct 2013].
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6. **NHS England.** *NHS Service Specifications Neonatal Critical Care* [Online]. Available from: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/resources/spec-comm-resources/npc-crg/group-e/e08> [Accessed: 01 Oct 2013].

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