

# Southampton neonatal unit: first to receive Bliss Baby Charter accreditation for family-centred care

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**T**he neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at Southampton's Princess Anne Hospital has become the first in the UK to receive official Bliss Baby Charter accreditation for its family-centred care for premature and sick babies, from the national charity Bliss.

This achievement follows a two-year process of audit, action and evaluation involving health professionals and parents of babies needing neonatal care.

The Bliss Baby Charter was developed by Bliss to help hospitals caring for premature and sick infants to assess the quality of the family-centred care they provide and identify areas for improvement. Through this accreditation process, Bliss can recognise and reward excellence in the care delivered by neonatal units, with a specific focus on the delivery of consistent, high quality family-centred care that recognises the vital role of parents in their baby's care.

Extensive research has shown that putting families at the heart of their baby's care is hugely beneficial. For babies, it can lower stress levels, promote better health, shorten hospital stays and reduce hospital readmissions. For parents, it helps promote

bonding with their baby and improves their confidence as a parent. For professionals, it can help improve relations between parents and staff, as well as freeing up nursing time, increasing productivity and boosting staff morale.

Once a unit registers its interest to complete the Bliss Baby Charter it then sets up an audit team within the unit to lead on the self-assessment. When it has completed its first audit the team sends it to Bliss with an action plan for review and feedback is given. The next step is to carry out a re-audit of the unit using the feedback provided and review the action plan. Once this has been completed, the unit will discuss with Bliss if it is ready for accreditation and if so, an assessment visit will be arranged.

The NICU at the Princess Anne Hospital has 36 cots: 20 intensive or high dependency cots and 16 special care cots. It is one of the largest in the country, seeing approximately 750 babies a year from across Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire and the Channel Islands. It was refurbished in 2006 to provide a bright, welcoming and spacious environment for babies and their families and offers a range of specialist services in neonatal medicine and surgery including cardiology, nephrology, neurosurgery and clinical



The unit offers a range of specialist services in neonatal medicine and surgery. Photo: University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust.



The refurbished neonatal unit provides a bright and spacious environment for babies and their families. Photo: University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust.

genetics. In addition to the intensive medical and surgical care facilities, other procedures and interventions can be performed on the unit, for example eye screening and laser treatment.

There are parent and carer facilities available on the unit and a range of support services: counselling, a donor breast milk bank, a neonatal hearing screening team and a dedicated neonatal dietitian, pharmacist, physiotherapist, and speech and language therapist.

Lisa Leppard, Family Care Sister, says, "We are passionate about the care our babies and families receive and immensely proud to be the first unit in the country to receive this award."

"The Bliss family friendly accreditation scheme has helped the team to focus on the care we give our families, as well as their babies, and to make the necessary improvements to provide the highest standards of family-centred care. We not only work very closely as a multi-professional team within Southampton, but we also work collaboratively with our network of colleagues across the region to share best practice."

Mum Zuzana Moody, whose son Ethan was born prematurely at 25 weeks' gestation, knows the difference that the provision of family-centred care on NICUs can make. As the Parent Volunteer Assessor for the scheme, she helped assess neonatal care at the Princess Anne Hospital by visiting and talking to families on the neonatal unit about their experiences. She says: "When your baby is in an incubator, it can leave you feeling cut out of the picture, unsure of what to expect. There is very little you can do for them, but you are their mum, and that's a vital relationship that needs to



Lisa Leppard, Family Care Sister at Southampton's Princess Anne Hospital and Reanna Watts, Senior Project Officer, Bliss.

be put at the heart of what doctors and nurses are doing.

"Parents need to feel that they can get information and support from NICU staff whenever they need it, as they do at the Princess Anne Hospital."

Caroline Davey, Chief Executive of Bliss, presented neonatal unit staff with a plaque and certificate in a special ceremony held at the hospital on 23 May. She said: "I am delighted to recognise the ongoing dedication of staff on this neonatal unit to putting babies and their families at the heart of everything they do."

"Their approach has won them the first ever Bliss Baby Charter accreditation but, more importantly, is making a vital difference every single day to all the babies they care for, as well as their parents and families. I look forward to seeing other neonatal units around the country follow the example of the Princess Anne Hospital in achieving this mark of excellence."

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