

## Bliss 30th birthday Baby Report Neonatal care in Wales - 2009



### Summary



Approximately 4,000 babies were admitted to neonatal care in Wales in 2008, equal to one in nine babies born last year. With a growing birth rate, this number looks set to increase year upon year.

Neonatal services have undergone 12 reviews since Bliss began in 1979. These were conducted by a range of official governmental and parliamentary bodies, professional organisations, and Bliss itself. Each documented failures in the system and recommended action to remedy these problems. However, none has ever been fully implemented.

Bliss warmly welcomes the investment and significant commitment to improving neonatal services made by the Welsh Assembly Government over the last year. However, new funding has yet to be translated into real improvements for special care babies and their families, and does not address all of the problems that neonatal services in Wales face.

We look forward to working with the Welsh Assembly Government and NHS Wales to support the introduction of these reforms as soon as possible. We call on the Welsh Assembly Government and NHS Wales to ensure that all areas of neonatal care receive the necessary resources to deliver the best care possible for our most vulnerable babies.

### A neonatal network and transfer service for Wales

In October 2008 Edwina Hart AM, the Minister for Health, announced £4 million new funding for neonatal services over two years. There has been a subsequent commitment to sustain this level of funding at £2 million each year.

This funding is dedicated to setting up:

- a neonatal transport system
- a clinical information system to capture data on the outcomes of care so that any areas for improvement can be identified
- coordination of care across Wales through a network of neonatal units.

These services are desperately needed and will greatly improve the care that babies and their families receive. However this funding is only sufficient to run a 12-hour transport service, which will operate from 9am to 9pm every day. This means babies born in the middle of the night will have to rely on existing ad hoc services.

### All Wales Neonatal Standards

The Welsh Assembly Government published a set of standards for neonatal care in December 2008. The All Wales Neonatal Standards present an ambitious vision for services for special care babies and their families, to be achieved over a ten-year period.

The standards set out that care should be provided in a coordinated network of neonatal units and that a dedicated transport service with specially trained staff should be in place at all times in all areas of Wales. The funding that has been provided to date will go a long way to meeting



these two standards, however further resources are clearly required to meet the standard for a round the clock neonatal transport service, which is due to be delivered within three years. This is the standard for transport services in Scotland and England. Special care babies in Wales deserve no less.

Other key standards include:

### Staffing of neonatal services

- one to one nursing care is provided to babies in intensive care, one to two nursing care in high dependency and one to four nursing care in special care
- appropriately trained doctors are available to all units at all times.

### Facilities and equipment

- support services including nutritional support, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy are readily available
- appropriate cots and equipment are in place for babies who need high dependency and intensive care.

### Care of the baby and the family

- breastfeeding is actively encouraged and supported in the unit
- support services are available when needed from a range of professionals, including social workers, bereavement counsellors, breastfeeding support staff, psychologists and translators
- resources are available for parent training.

## Remaining concerns

While we warmly welcome the clear set of standards and investment in a dedicated 12-hour transport service, there is much more to do to ensure all babies born in Wales receive the quality of care they need and deserve.

The Welsh Assembly Government highlighted in the All Wales Neonatal Standards that there are significant shortages in trained neonatal nurses and cots. Although we welcome the ambitious vision set out by these standards, it is clear that these will not be achieved within current levels of funding for these services.

A previous review of neonatal care from 2005, which was never published and was not acted on for several years, estimated that the cost of implementing its recommendations to be £10 million – significantly more funding than has been identified to date.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to continue with the good work it has started for special care babies and their families, and invest the additional resources needed to fully transform neonatal services in line with the clear vision it set out in the past year.

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for babies born too soon,  
too small, too sick