

MSLC Good Practice

Case study - Better breastfeeding support on the postnatal ward in Lewisham

What has been achieved?

Breastfeeding Peer Supporters provide voluntary support on the postnatal Ward (Maternity 5) at University Hospital Lewisham to offer additional infant feeding support for mothers, fathers and babies alongside that given by midwifery staff and maternity support workers. In five months (Aug-Dec 2014), 81 mothers were supported in this way. The ethnicity of the mothers was diverse, with 53% being non-White British, including Caribbean and African women (White and Black/Black), Indian and other Asian women, Chinese, White Irish and other White women. This pattern of access to additional and on-going breastfeeding support is seen in the Lewisham Baby Cafes as well as on the postnatal wards.

What is the philosophy behind the intervention?

The support for breastfeeding follows UNICEF principles. The aim is to ensure that all volunteers on the postnatal ward are supporting the information given by midwives to ensure that mothers feel confident with hand expressing, how to tell that their babies are getting enough milk and the key principals of positioning and attachment. There is a further commitment, Natalie Hickman, said:

'We are also keen that all mothers receive information about responsive feeding and creating a loving relationship with their baby.'

How did you achieve public and parent involvement (PPI)?

Seven volunteers from the local community with breastfeeding experience have received orientation in order to provide support on the postnatal ward and of these five have spent time there with new mothers. MSLC Co-chair, Stefanie Manfra-Kara said:

'As part of the MSLC's commitment to 'walking the patch', feedback from women includes the need for more breastfeeding support on the postnatal ward. The MSLC supports the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme and feels that breastfeeding peer supporter volunteering at Lewisham Hospital can make a real difference to women in the first few days when everything is new and they are getting breastfeeding established.'

What developments are planned?

In October 2014, in an attempt to discover the reasons why more peer supporters are not able to provide support on the postnatal ward, a link to an online questionnaire was sent to all peer supporters. The results of this survey were presented in the 'Barriers to Peer Support on the Postnatal Ward Report' (Oct 2014). Altogether, 21 peer supporters took part. Results showed that most are keen to volunteer on the ward and those who already provide support are keen to do more. The main factors preventing them from doing so are childcare responsibilities, limited time and experience. Identifying the barriers for those who wish to provide support, and those who wish to do more peer support, will help to show how the best to support the volunteers.

Further information is available from Natalie Hickman, including a series of audit reports (e.g. LBPS Postnatal Ward Report_AugtoDec2014 Lewisham)

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