Walk this way to Walk the Patch
This document is for the use of MSLC committee members only.

What is Walk the Patch?
Walk the Patch is a volunteer-led program to collect direct feedback from current maternity users on the antenatal and postnatal wards, from users of the birth centre at the hospital and from women who give birth at home supported by community midwives.

Walk the Patchers feedback their reports to the Maternity Service Liaison Committee (MSLC) which is a multi-disciplinary forum made up of parents, managers, midwives, doctors and commissioners who work together to shape the local maternity service.

Information from Walk the Patch sessions is fed back via the MSLC to senior managers in the trust who will then ask the maternity department to formally respond. This shows that the hospital really value what Walking the Patchers do and are very keen to hear what women and families think of their service. More importantly, feedback will be used to make things better.

It’s worth remembering that many women who give feedback during Walking the Patch are really pleased with their care. Walk the patch gives an opportunity for senior managers in the trust to hear about good care and make sure the individuals or teams involved are recognised.

Who can Walk the Patch?
Walk the Patchers are the parents who form the service user membership of the MSLC.

How do I start to Walk the Patch?
1. Inform the MSLC chair that you would like to become a WtP-er.
2. Contact whoever is in charge of Volunteer Services at the hospital. You will have to complete a DBS check, as well as probably an occupational health check and the Trust Volunteer services form (ask MSLC chair for these)
3. Once the checks have been completed, contact the Maternity Unit to arrange your visit. You don’t have to arrange the visit weeks in advance if you find that you spontaneously have an hour to spare free to call up and let them know that you are coming. You should ask to speak to the midwifery manager in charge for your visit. You should let them know when you arrive and speak to them when you leave to give a quick debrief.
4. You are welcome to arrange a joint visit with another walk the patch volunteer so that you don't have to go alone. This might be particularly helpful if it is your first visit.

Now you're ready to Walk the Patch

Below are some guidelines on how to Walk the Patch, although it’s important to be yourself. The first thing you should do is introduce yourself and ask if the woman is up to having a chat.

You should explain a bit about what you are doing and where the information is going. Previous Walk the Patchers from other MSLCs have initiated the chat by explaining that they have given birth at their local unit and then joined a voluntary group to help improve the care to other new mums. A detailed description of the MSLC is a bit of a mouthful and generally women aren't interested. You can leave them with an MSLC leaflet which they can read in their own time if they want.

You will be having an informal chat so don't feel tied to asking these questions but here are some as suggestions. You don't have to ask them all!

1. How long have you been on the post natal ward?
2. How would you describe your experience of having a baby at the PRU hospital?
   • Do you have any positive aspects that you can highlight?
   • Are there any particular areas for improvement that you would like to feed back?
3. Did you receive medication if/when you needed it?
4. Do you feel as if you've been treated with care and compassion during your time here?
5. Have any individuals/team stood out for positive or negative reasons?
6. Would you recommend the hospital to your pregnant friends/family?
7. Is there anything else you would like me to flag anonymously?
8. Have you received breast feeding support if/when you’ve needed it?

It may be as time goes on that you ask specific questions to women about one or more areas of care, depending on the information you are hoping to gather.
What if there's a problem with the care a woman is receiving?

From time to time you will be told about a specific issue that you feel needs to be dealt with immediately. When this happens it's important that you don't feel responsible for resolving any issues yourself. You should go directly to the midwifery manager on duty who will deal with the situation appropriately.

This practical support and resolution of an issue is one of the most satisfying aspects of Walk the Patch and is the reason why we joined the MSLC in the first place: to improve a woman's experience of maternity care.

How long should I be there?

You are giving up your own time so this is completely up to you. If you are only able to speak to one woman that is totally fine. The important thing is to give yourself enough time for the de-brief with the midwifery manager at the end of the visit. This is so that you do not leave feeling the burden of anything you have heard or experienced during your visit. This is also so that you can pass on any issues that require immediate attention.

What do I do with the information I have collected?

Please send your notes in whatever form is easiest for you to the chair of the MSLC. The only thing to ensure is that the mothers are completely unidentifiable in the report. This is to retain women's confidentiality. You can do this by numbering the women rather than using names.

You are welcome to use previous reports (ask the chair for these) as a template for your own report.