

Maternity services are generally improving but person-centred care fundamentals are still being missed – particularly in postnatal care

Newly published [2015 NHS Maternity Survey](#) results reflect a generally improving service: despite continuing challenges around staffing levels and demand, the majority of women are reporting positive maternity experiences. However, effective service user involvement, a pillar of person centred care, is not always being achieved – particularly in terms of postnatal care.

The Care Quality Commission Survey, developed and co-ordinated by Picker Institute Europe, was completed by 20,631 people and found variation in the quality of communication, involvement and information provision for mothers using maternity services. This was a particular issue for first time mothers, of whom only 53% felt that they were given “*enough information from either a midwife or doctor to help you decide where to have your baby.*”

Postnatal care is an area in need of particular focus. Once mothers returned home, they reported poorer continuity of care and there were some gaps in information and support. Only 28% of mothers saw the same midwife for each of their postnatal appointments and check-ups, despite the majority (78%) seeing a midwife no more than four times after returning home. Although almost all mothers (97%) were asked how they were feeling emotionally, only 57% were given information about potential postnatal emotional changes. Similarly, less than two in three women said that they “definitely” got enough help and advice about feeding their baby in the six weeks after the birth – although this did represent an improvement from 2013 (65% vs 63%).

Commenting on the results, Dr Andrew McCulloch, Chief Executive at the Picker Institute said; “*We welcome the publication, which provides encouraging evidence that more women are having positive maternity experiences by comparison to 2013 results. Mothers reported generally positive experiences of antenatal and intrapartum care, but more attention needs to be paid to postnatal experiences. Duty of care does not stop at the hospital exit. A quality process means considering a mother’s full maternal experience. Good information and support around physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as practical issues such as feeding are vital – especially for first time mothers. The survey shows too many gaps in these areas.*”

For person-centred care to be effective, active involvement in decision making is a must. Without transparent communication and proportionate information provision it cannot be properly achieved. Getting person-centred care right starts with taking responsibility for building and driving a culture that enables it. The fact that more mothers are having positive experiences than ever before is laudable and testament to the work being done to improve services, but we must not be complacent and forget about those that are still not getting the quality care they deserve.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- Further information and survey results are available on the CQC website at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/maternity-services-survey-2015>
- The survey was designed by the Picker Institute on behalf of the CQC.
- The survey was developed with extensive input from service users and stakeholders, and we acknowledge the kind support of all of those who contributed their views and experiences to this process.
- 20,631 people who gave birth in February 2015 (and January 2015 at smaller Trusts.)
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