
Hywel Dda Community Health Council

MATERNITY FOCUS GROUP

Breastfeeding Support

January 2022



What we did

Having undertaken a maternity survey in 2021, we heard that some mums felt that breastfeeding support was not ideal in hospital. We met with 2 new mums who wanted to tell us their experience as part of an informal discussion about breastfeeding support.

Is more action needed and if so, what?

We know that our maternity survey and our discussions with people may not be representative of all views. We also know that the situation under the pandemic has presented additional difficulties for health services. Our two key messages are that:

- Breastfeeding support for new mothers under the covid pandemic has been insufficient.**
- Ways need to be identified of enabling the Health Board to provide more practical support to new mums who are trying to establish breast feeding.**

What was discussed?

We heard from 2 mums whose babies were born during the pandemic situation. This had given them challenges not only for their births but particularly for establishing and continuing with breastfeeding afterwards. They had both very much wanted to breastfeed their babies, however they found that it wasn't always easy to get support to do this.

Our First Time Mum

One first time mum had planned in advance for her birth and knew because she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes that she might face a longer stay and maybe some challenges with breastfeeding. She researched this and knew what problems might arise.

Whilst the actual delivery went well, the time after delivery was challenging. She was exhausted and her husband was not allowed in the ward to give her any help or support because of the pandemic limitations. Mum had no sleep and ultimately desperately felt that she needed to go home to rest. As a result felt she had to accept limited support to establish breastfeeding, just so she could go home and get the help she needed to recover from her delivery and be supported by her family. She didn't feel confident leaving hospital but felt that if she said this, she would have to stay in hospital longer but without being guaranteed of the help she needed.



After discharge from hospital, mum continued to persevere with breastfeeding but developed mastitis. She found a lactation consultant and had a zoom call. An organisation called 'Llaeth Mam', kept supporting her and told her that she could ask for a feeding assessment. By this time, she had cracked and damaged nipples.

Llaeth mam continued to provide support and spent significant amounts of time helping her establish a good feeding latch with her baby and supporting her.

Overall, she developed mastitis 3 times and ultimately when her baby had to be readmitted to hospital, she had to take a short break from breastfeeding. Despite this she continued with expressing milk and her baby has continued with breastfeeding and some formula feed.



She feels that the support from Llaeth Mam has been invaluable but that it was by her own research that she found out about this.

The absence of any health visitor coming to the house and helping her in the days after her baby was born, meant that breastfeeding was really difficult to achieve on her own. She felt upset and let down that breastfeeding support had not been in place.



Our Experienced Mum

Our experienced mum who had already combination fed her other 2 children also had a challenging delivery. She had her baby at the start of lockdown and although she had planned to deliver at home, last minute complications meant that her birth plan had to be set aside.

She told us that she was really worried about the lockdown situation and the risk from covid. Her birth plans had to change at last minute and she was unsettled because staff did not know what was happening or what was safe. This meant that because of her rising blood pressure, she wasn't allowed a home birth.

It eventually meant that she was in slow labour for 2 days and had an induction. When she went into Glangwili Hospital, there were a few issues because she had to labour slowly, without support from her husband or any visitors.



Compared to her previous births she found that she was on her own and felt isolated. It was also scary with masks everywhere and staff wearing full PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).

She haemorrhaged after the birth and passed out so she had to stay in 1 night. She felt really weak but wanted to go home as she was missing her husband and children. She went home but a midwife couldn't come to the house and so she had to go to a local hospital to be checked. This happened on more than one occasion, the pandemic regulations meant she had to attend on her own, carrying a baby in a carrier when she was physically very weak.

She also sought advice from a lactation consultant, having developed thrush on more than one occasion.

She recalls trying to get her baby diagnosed with thrush and trying to take photographs of her baby's mouth to show he had thrush.

She eventually managed to get help from Llaeth Mam and successfully breastfed her baby for a year, but this has not been without difficulty.



In Summary

Both mums told us that that there were so many points in time where there could have been interventions that would have helped them breastfeed more effectively. They felt that if they hadn't reached out themselves to find support, there wasn't anything readily available to them from the usual places such as midwives, health visitors, GPs and hospitals.

Both mums felt that Hywel Dda University Health Board needed to have a lactation consultant on shift, as a point of contact and support. They told us that Hywel Dda Health Board should be supporting Llaeth Mam.

Both mentioned a named person in Llaeth Mam who had given them invaluable practical advice and support which had helped them enormously.

They told us that there was a lot of emphasis on breastfeeding being the right thing for mums to do for their babies. When they were unable to do it easily, this made them feel guilty.

They felt that there was a lot of stigma attached to formula feeding but that midwives were under too much pressure to actively support them with breast feeding

They said that there is a lot of societal pressure to breastfeed but not the support.

Mums hear about the long-term benefits of breastfeeding but don't get the short-term help that they need to achieve this. They told us that if the NHS is serious about helping to encourage breastfeeding, there needs to be wrap around support and better ways of recognising when mums are in difficulty.

Hywel Dda CHC are seeking to carry out further focus groups as part of our wider strategy to hear about the experiences of midwifery care highlighted in our Maternity Report. If you would to be a part of one of our future focus groups to talk about your experience, then please get in touch.

Our Maternity Report – “Having a baby in Hywel Dda, what you told us....” Can be found on our website along with the Health Board's response and action plan.

www.hywelddachc.wales

Recommendations

1. Hywel Dda Health Board needs to review the way it supports mothers who want to breastfeed and identify where there are gaps.

2. Mums need support from midwives on the ward and in the community as well as health visitors and this support is not currently effective. The Health Board needs to identify ways of effectively providing this support consistently both in hospital and outside of hospital settings.

3. The Health Board needs to continuously engage with new mums to find out what is working and what isn't working in terms of breastfeeding support. The experience of new mums can help identify and address the practical issues identified.

Accessible formats

This report is also available in Welsh.

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us.

You can download it from our website or ask for a copy by contacting our office.

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