

Neonatal Care

Get it Right - RIGHT NUMBERS

Of the 33,000 babies born in Wales each year, approximately 3,800 are admitted to the 13 neonatal units in Wales.

In December 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government published its All Wales Neonatal Standards for Children and Young People's Specialised Healthcare Services. The Royal College of Nursing welcomed these standards which are ambitious and acknowledge there is much work to be done to improve the service. They endorse and echo the British Association of Perinatal Medicine's (BAPM) staffing standards, including units providing intensive care levels of one nurse to one baby. It is suggested that the CYPSSP standards are monitored and audited annually, a move that would make Wales an example for the rest of the UK.

Among other important targets, the Standards set out a commitment to deliver one to one nursing care to babies in intensive care within four to ten years.

In spring 2008, Bliss (the special care baby charity) sent out a Freedom of Information request that was responded to by all 13 units in Wales. This revealed there were a total of 382 neonatal nurses employed across Wales in 2007. When we look at the amount of care that babies needed in 2007, we can calculate, using the BAPM minimum nursing standards, how many nurses in total are needed across Wales to deliver that care. To maintain a manageable workload and to cope with sudden peaks in demand, experts recommend that neonatal units should aim to work at 70 per cent occupancy.

To achieve this, we calculate that Wales needs a total neonatal nursing staff of around 500.

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government announced an annually recurring £2 million investment in neonatal care to deliver a dedicated neonatal transport system, a clinical information system and development of clinical networks. This is a welcome start and RCN Wales believes neonatal care should be a priority for investment.

This briefing has been prepared in partnership with Bliss (the special care baby charity).

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- Neonatal care must be provided in complete compliance with BAPM 2001 standards.
- Babies are entitled to the same level of nursing care as adults and children in intensive care. Anything less than one to one nursing for babies in intensive care is unacceptable.
- The Welsh Assembly Government and Local Health Boards need to fully support, fund and implement the recommendations of the HCW review and CYPSSP standards.
- The Welsh Assembly Government, in conjunction with Local Health Boards, must draw up action plans to tackle the drastic shortage of qualified neonatal nurses.
- Neonatal care must be seen as an integrated part of maternity services. Increasing the number of midwives, neonatal nurses and community neonatal nurses must be part of a long-term strategic plan to improve care for mothers and babies.
- Round-the-clock access to dedicated neonatal transport services must be available to all units in Wales including, where appropriate, cross-border transfers.
- Bliss leaflets and other information for parents to be made available to families in all units across Wales.

