
A Report on Maternity Care in Darlington

July 2017



Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	3
Methodology	6
Maternity Services Survey	6
1. How would you rate your antenatal care?	6
2. How would you rate care in labour and giving birth?	6
3. How would you rate your post-natal care?	6
4. Any general thoughts, opinion, likes or dislikes that you want to list? From the moment you got into the hospital, to the time you got out?	7
Recommendations	13

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Darlington carried out a short survey to achieve a better understanding of what patients and their families thought about the maternity care they had received at Darlington Memorial Hospital in the last year.

This was due to worrying feedback received regarding staff attitudes, despite earlier reassurances from the NHS County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) that measures put in place to address the long history of a troubled working environment and the poor behaviour of staff, were actually having a positive outcome.

We were pleasantly surprised at the snapshot of experiences we received where the majority of women told us about a dedicated workforce who are committed to providing them, their babies and their families with good quality care and compassion.

There are areas of improvement we would like to see such as the discharge procedures and closer monitoring of nursing and midwifery staff by line managers so that issues of negative attitude are directly challenged and corrected.

It seems there is a culture where established routines take precedence over patient expressed needs. We would like reassurances that women, babies and their families receive the midwifery care they need, regardless of the time of the day or the day of the week.

We also felt that rumoured changes to maternity services must have an effect on staff morale and we would like reassurances that staff are fully supported by their managers, experience good team working and have their issues and concerns heard.

Healthwatch Darlington would like to thank everyone who took part in our maternity services survey during July. Your views and experiences have enabled us to have a clearer understanding of local services and we hope will make a difference not only to future care, but staff morale, staff attitudes and the working environment as a whole.

Last but not least, we would like to say thank you to a dedicated workforce within the hospital and across the community who are committed to providing women, their babies and their families with high quality care and kindness.



Introduction

In 2016 an external review of Maternity Services was commissioned by County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust due to concerns raised over interpersonal behaviours, a series of serious incidents and never events, and the processes for following clinical guidelines. The review¹ by Elizabeth Ross, Head of Midwifery and James Dwyer, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist at York Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, considered the views of members of staff and anonymous comments and the review of incident reports.

The review explored the culture and provision of services in units at Darlington Memorial Hospital (DMH) and the University Hospital of North Durham (UHND), and sought assurances on safety and identified areas where improvements could be made.

The final report concluded that the maternity services were safe, but staff attitudes and behaviour could be improved along with further quality improvements regarding the maternity care for twin pregnancies and deliveries. Due to this recommendation, twin deliveries were moved over to James Cook Hospital as an interim measure.

Since then, Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) have been carefully observing the impact of the interim service change on patients including safety and staff attitudes. At a recent Health and Partnership Scrutiny Committee meeting, HWD were reassured to hear the measures that had been put in place to address the long history of a troubled working environment and the poor behaviour of staff, were actually having a positive outcome.

However, shortly after receiving reassurance, HWD were disappointed to learn that maternity services at Darlington Memorial Hospital were once again under threat due to pressures within the system and this time for single births. In addition HWD had also received worrying feedback from three separate families on three separate occasions regarding staff attitudes.

- **Staff Attitude (1)** - spouse being spoken to 'like a child' when raising concerns about care.
- **Staff Attitude (2)** - Mum-to-be had discussed and agreed a pain relief plan with the community midwife but this was overruled by the hospital midwife. The new pain relief took an hour and a half to arrive. Spouse had tried to get this sooner but the midwife talked down to him 'like a child'. A 'C' section was needed. 2 consultants attended at different times, both with very different attitudes - one very good and the other very dismissive.
- **Care** - complications during labour were not detected soon enough and mother and child became very ill.

¹ <https://www.cddft.nhs.uk/media/506963/maternity%20services%20review%20report%20.pdf>

In response to the patient feedback, HWD decided to carry out a short survey to achieve a better understanding of what patients and their families thought about the maternity care they had received in the last year.



“Good communication when labour wasn't progressing as 'normal'”

“Excellent care throughout my whole pregnancy”



Methodology

Maternity Services Survey

91 people completed our survey during a 2 week period. 3.45% delivered their babies at home and 96.55% delivered their babies at Darlington Memorial Hospital.

1. How would you rate your antenatal care?

VERY GOOD	SATISFACTORY	NEITHER GOOD OR BAD	UNSATISFACTORY	TERRIBLE
86.67%	11.11%	0.00%	2.22%	0.00%

2. How would you rate care in labour and giving birth?

VERY GOOD	SATISFACTORY	NEITHER GOOD OR BAD	UNSATISFACTORY	TERRIBLE
87.91%	9.89%	0.00%	1.10%	1.10%

3. How would you rate your post-natal care?

VERY GOOD	SATISFACTORY	NEITHER GOOD OR BAD	UNSATISFACTORY	TERRIBLE
64.84%	27.47%	3.30%	0.00%	4.40%



4. Any general thoughts, opinion, likes or dislikes that you want to list? From the moment you got into the hospital, to the time you got out?

Positive

- *“Breast feeding support in hospital was amazing when baby wouldn't latch. Great support all round.”*
- *“Amazing help for breast feeding, great support during first night with baby, couldn't have asked for better. Friendly staff that always had a smile for you. My delivery mid wife completely understood me from the moment I walked in and kept a very happy/lively attitude throughout. She made me laugh (what more could you ask for!) and was just brilliant at every step.”*
- *“The doctors' nurses and care assistants were just amazing, I was so well looked after from arriving at the hospital to have both of my babies until I left. They were so kind and caring and very helpful even though they were rushed off their feet. Had I had to go to an alternative hospital further away for my 1st child I would have had her on the road side with serious complications and no assistance.”*

“We were looked after extremely well from start to finish.”

- *“All staff where excellent in my experience. Every midwife couldn't do enough before & after baby arrived making sure we were both safe & as comfortable as possible. Even though they were under staffed & over stretching resources.”*
- *“I can't fault the care in any way. I had a planned c-section and was looked after so well by everybody.”*
- *“Fantastic midwives, doctors and surgeons. An amazing service that we will be lost without!”*
- *“Great having the hospital so close to home as I went to pregnancy assessment unit a few times as concerns about reduced movements. They were amazing and set my mind at ease. The labour was hard but the staff were amazing and if I am lucky enough to have a 2nd baby I would want to have it at DMH.”*
- *“Midwives and all other staff were excellent and helped me when I was a clueless new mum to my first and with getting my second daughter to latch properly. Excellent service received.”*
- *“I had a c section due to a bad breach, and all the staff were*

“Very good care absolutely fantastic birth.”

amazing. Made me feel relaxed in a friendly and efficient atmosphere. Couldn't have picked anywhere better and I've got wonderful memories of what could have been a very worrying time."

"No complaints
very proud of
our NHS"

- "Everyone right from the top to the bottom were friendly kind caring and always had time for you :) the breast feeding support specialist was a much loved welcome and I know that when baby number 2 comes in a few months' time I am in the best of the best care."
- "I was looked after extremely well with both my pregnancies. Please keep this service."
- "The staff looked after me so well and I needed my consultant there in the end so grateful to have that service there. I understand the complications and the need to have a reactive and flexible service which I was lucky to have in Darlington."
- "I was treated like part of their family and felt very safe."
- "We had the most amazing midwives, one of which was meant to be finishing shift near the end of my labour but she didn't leave me even though she must have been tired. I will never forget them and I'm pretty sure when my little boy came out with a bleeding cord she saved him."
- "Amazing staff, clean hospital and friendly service - would never consider anything other than a hospital delivery."
- "I was looked after and made to feel special for both my deliveries. Was also treated with care and compassion due to a miscarriage"
- "As a resident of Darlington, the ability to get to hospital without too much worry, as my waters had broken and was brown, which I had been told could mean baby was in distress. Support while in, during and especially with breastfeeding was amazing as were all staff members I encountered."
- "Couldn't fault the care myself and my babies received. Was treated with dignity throughout."
- "The staff could not do enough. If it wasn't for them then I would not have established breast feeding."

"All the staff
were fantastic
with us."

“Not given birth yet but so far great care”

“Staff where fantastic”

- *“My experience was very good from start to end, the staff were friendly and attentive and throughout labour a midwife was constantly in the room which made me feel safe and more relaxed.”*
- *“Received perfectly adequate care and had a safe delivery of twins by caesarian section.”*
- *“Both me and my baby (and my partner) were very well looked after.”*
- *“All of the staff on the labour ward do a brilliant job. I had my little boy on Boxing Day and I was in and out of hospital on Christmas Day. Staff were so friendly, accommodating and supportive. They helped my little boy arrive safely. This is my second labour there and I couldn't speak any more highly of the labour ward. It would be such a shame to see it close.”*
- *“Appreciated having the same midwife throughout labour and delivery.”*
- *“Everyone was so helpful. I was given encouragement and support through labour. Had everything explained to me and the emergency c-section I then required. I then had amazing staff look after me and my baby boy in recovery never got tired of me buzzing them into see to the baby being sick. Amazing staff 98% of my stay.”*
- *“Dislike feeling like I have no choice in what happens with my body. Like I had an amazing midwife for my children, she was so caring and wasn't hell bent on sticking to the guidelines. She actually took the time to consider my thoughts and feelings.”*
- *“Glad to have a hospital close as neither of my births were straightforward and I was in good hands and felt very well cared for both before, during and after!”*
- *“The staff were amazing with me, I called up the day before I was due, with reduced movements. They got me in, monitored me, scanned me and I even got a sweep. They never made me feel daft or like I was wasting their time. Midwife delivered my daughter the following day with no issues and was so lovely.”*

“I couldn't have asked for a better standard of care from all of the staff I encountered.”

“A brilliant service with a team who go beyond their duty.”

- *“Love the fact that a student midwife looked after me before birth and managed to deliver my baby at home too by coming in on their day off! And looked after me post-natal too. A continuity of care is so important.”*

Negative

- *“I found the midwives extremely unfriendly and uncaring. I was told I was low on the priority list for an epidural and to just endure the pain, then the epidural was leaking out of my back and despite me repeatedly saying I could feel the contractions I was told I couldn't because I'd had an epidural. I was induced. I had my baby at 4.24pm and was kept in overnight. Nobody came to see that I was ok and I had no clue what I was doing. I was on a ward with c-section women and their babies cried all night as Mother's couldn't pick them up. I was exhausted after 3 days of no sleep prior to baby arriving. I was told not to touch my baby's cheek while breastfeeding as it would distract the baby from feeding? The next day, it took twelve hours to discharge me after baby checks, when we could have left after two hours.”*
- *“If someone has had recurrent miscarriages it would be so reassuring to be offered regular scans throughout pregnancy, rather than having to pay privately for this. Also, the TEG test (offered at St Mary's, London) is very good for diagnosing problems that can cause recurrent miscarriage - it would be wonderful if this technology could be brought more locally.”*

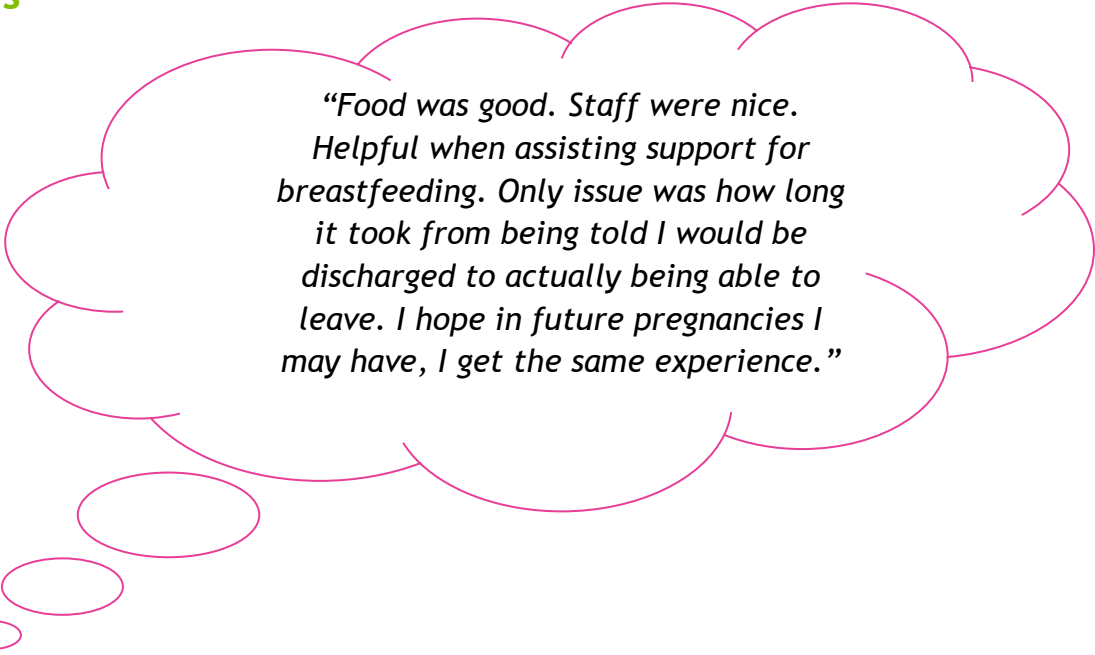
“I had a fairly standard birth experience. It would have been nice to have been cared for by the same people throughout my labour but it lasted for 40 hours and I understand that with shift patterns this couldn't have been possible. My baby was in SCBU and my experience of both the postnatal ward and special care was appalling, I hated every minute.”

- *“I found with my 3rd baby after losing my 2nd to sids that the midwives didn't understand my anxieties and the reasons why I didn't want to stay overnight.”*
- *“It was very busy my last baby was born on a Saturday morning therefore had to wait for doctor to discharge me it was a long wait.”*
- *“Midwives had no people skills offered no support during labour then was left for 6 hours on my own straight after birth.”*

- *“Horrendous care regarding breast feeding, I was the informed in hospital after struggling with breast feeding the only thing left was a crises feed, really were not supportive at all.”*
- *“Baby needs an appointment for scan was told it would get it within a week still waiting 2 weeks on spoke to 2 midwives about it but has still not had response.”*

“More support for 1st time mum’s as I was very anxious about everything”

Mixed views



“Food was good. Staff were nice. Helpful when assisting support for breastfeeding. Only issue was how long it took from being told I would be discharged to actually being able to leave. I hope in future pregnancies I may have, I get the same experience.”

- *“Both my babies were born really quick. First time they wanted to send me home, but as I did not want to and weather conditions were bad they didn't push it. My boy was born 45 min later. Second time I told the midwives my previous experience and that my mother shot her babies out too. For some reason I wanted to go to the toilet during labour, my husband sent the midwife in to check when he thought I took too long. By the time I was half carried back to the bed my son's head was showing. At both instances I was helped by experienced midwives, both times my speedy deliveries and me and my husband sayings they were likely to be quick fell on polite but deaf ears. All in all though, I cannot fault the care we received, especially afterwards with my first and before with my second. I was nervous about getting the*

breastfeeding right and no matter how many times I asked them to check the latch they always took the time to check and advice. And let me stay until I felt I was confident about it. My first was on the small side so had extra checks with my second. Discovered my amniotic fluids were low the last couple of months, got even more checks then. Good calm reassuring staff.”

- *“Support with breastfeeding after having my baby could have been better. For all they promote it before having a baby I personally didn't think the support was very good after. There was the odd midwife who was very good don't get me wrong but there were times when I rang my bedside bell to request help and it seemed like such an effort for some which didn't give me confidence considering it was my first baby and I didn't have a clue. On a positive note, the whole team looking after me during my emergency c section was fantastic, completely put me at ease and I couldn't fault them at all.”*

“The care you receive is good but it was obvious there isn't enough staff to care for the ladies on the ward that was apparent as soon as I arrived at the hospital. As a first time mother I found the maternity nurses don't give as much attention to the mothers as they could i.e. time to spend with them, your just left to get on with it although you have no idea what you're doing. I think more staff would definitely improve the service, but I appreciate they are all doing their best.”



- *“I came to the Ward 7-8cm. The first midwife was fantastic! A lovely lady! Made me comfortable and as relaxed as possible. Nothing was too much trouble. Her shift ended during my labour, not long before pushing. The next midwife was very short with me and rather uptight. I never asked her but I got the impression she had not experienced labour for herself and was somewhat cold hearted to the pain! When I started pushing, my baby’s head would breach but go back and I just could not get her out by myself! I was exhausted after what felt like hours pushing! I told the midwife I needed help and was pushing as hard as I could! She dismissed this and said it was 'just' the burn stopping me. After continuing to push my babies head still just breaching, I pleaded for some help as my babies heart rate slowed as did my contractions! I was totally exhausted with barely anything left in me but the thought my daughter could be in trouble meant I kept fighting! Eventually she conceded and prepped me for fontuse. As it turned out my baby was a lot smaller than expected and her umbilical cord was wrapped round her neck, under her arm and down round her leg! There was no way with all the best will in the world I could naturally push her out!”*

Recommendations

Healthwatch Darlington recommend the following be taken into account by the NHS County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust’s Maternity Service:

- A review of discharge procedures to speed up the process, thus reducing the likelihood of stress for newborn and parents.
- Closer monitoring of nursing and midwifery staff by line managers and issues of negative attitude directly challenged and corrected.
- Patient first should be real and not simply a strapline. There appears to be a culture where established routines take precedence over patient expressed needs.
- CDDFT need to be aware that any change to local maternity services whether that be rumoured or planned is bound to have an effect on staff morale.
- CDDFT must ensure women, babies and their families receive the midwifery care they need, regardless of the time of the day or the day of the week.



