Neonatal services under strain

Sometimes, the weight and volume of evidence for a situation attains a critical mass and forces a reaction. This has just happened after the charity Bliss released a report that highlights the strain the neonatal service has been under this year, and the experiences of families in England and Wales.

The report also considers the state of the neonatal transport service. This is important because the neonatal service is configured in regional networks and the sickest infants must sometimes be transferred long distances. Over the summer the Care Quality Commission has also released a report (see page 6) with three main themes:

» Communication between obstetric/midwifery services and neonatal centres when ultrasound scan detects congenital anomalies.

» How neonatal blood pressure is measured and managed.

» The commissioning of a long-term ventilation service. The report concludes that there are opportunities for improvement in all the areas considered.

This body of evidence suggesting a stagnation of neonatal service development has been underscored by a report from the National Neonatal Audit Programme (see page 8), led by a specialist team and funded by NHS England and the Welsh and Scottish governments.

With so many complex problems to address, NHS England has created a neonatal critical care clinical reference group. The group, which has a wide remit and has started well, will recommend ways to support the delivery of a safe, sustainable and equitable model of neonatal care across England.

There will be similar requirements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to review services. It is to be hoped that this time there is a real commitment to neonatal care.

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