

## **Parental involvement in neonatal care: A qualitative study of the use of interpreters**

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### **Objective:**

Research funded by the London Perinatal Networks Steering Group to investigate the provision of neonatal services to parents with limited English proficiency (LEP).

### **Methods:**

The study gathered data from health professionals, LEP parents and interpreters using a multi-method qualitative approach during 2004 and 2005.

Thirty-nine staff working in five London neonatal units took part in one to one and group interviews which examined their views of working with LEP parents and with interpreters. Interviews included staff of different levels of seniority in a variety of nursing, clinical, management and support roles. Data was collected using an adapted version of 'Pinboard' (Meta Plan) which involves the systematic preparation of a written record of the proceedings and includes the participants in the analysis of the data gathered.

Depth interviews were conducted with five sets of parents with limited English proficiency (n=8). The interviews were conducted by the author with the assistance of a bilingual interpreter and a representative of BLISS, the premature baby charity. Interviews were tape recorded and a verbatim transcript was prepared in English and analysed using the Framework method.

A group interview was held with eleven interpreters with experience of working in London hospitals using a combination of adapted 'Pinboard' techniques and a focus group. The written record was checked and agreed by participants. The focus group element was tape recorded and the transcript was analysed using Framework Analysis.

### **Results:**

In talking about language support, neonatal staff were generally positive about the use of trained interpreters to communicate effectively with LEP parents. They were particularly opposed to the use of family, friends and other informal means of providing language support. However they described difficulties with using interpreters and often did not use them in practice. They felt that LEP parents were not getting a service that was equal to that provided to English speaking parents.

Parents were generally very happy with the care provided for their babies. They described how they received and used a complex pattern of language support including hospital interpreters (face to face and telephone), bilingual staff and family and friends. All parents described times when no language support was available and they struggled to communicate with staff. Limited language support impacted negatively on parents' health and presented barriers to their involvement in the care of their babies.

The interviews with interpreters provided evidence that different units have access to very different levels of language support. It was clear that interpreting services in some hospitals are under-resourced, leading to inappropriately short times spent with clients and long waits for an appointment with an interpreter.

### **Conclusions:**

Parents who do not speak English receive a service unequal to that provided to English speaking parents and there are risks associated with some accepted practices. A lack of language support

may negatively impact on parents' ability to become involved in their baby's care. This may in turn affect the way they bond with their baby and thus impact on the baby's development.