

Anonymous - Written evidence (PRT0009)

I have lived experience of preterm birth: my first child was a spontaneous preterm birth at 35+6 weeks' gestation in 2017. I wish the call for evidence to hear my lived experience.

Apparently, we were in 'Transitional care' on the standard postnatal ward in hospital, but this was never explained to me or my partner.

I think you need to include transitional care in this call for evidence.

I experienced a lack of trained/specialist breastfeeding/infant feeding support, partly because of all the hospital/postnatal ward systems, procedures, routines and tests. After birth, a support worker gave me an A5 leaflet on hand expressing, a cup and a pipette and left me to it because they were so busy and short-staffed on the ward.

We had a lack of communication and information about preterm birth and what that could mean. It wasn't until my baby was 3 days old that a neonatal nurse specialist sat and talked with my partner and me. She was very good and supportive, but we were left for those 3 days without enough information and didn't know what to expect.

My baby and I had a 10-day stay on the postnatal ward, moved into our own room on day 2. This felt like a long stay, and was primarily to establish my baby's feeding, rate of weight gain and treat newborn jaundice twice. I believe we could have had much better breastfeeding/infant feeding support, communication and help to make fully informed decisions, which would have meant a shorter admission in hospital. I almost discharged myself and my baby around day 8 or 9 because I was so fed up, unsupported and wanted to go home to start life with my baby in comfort and peace.

There was absolutely no psychological support during or after my preterm birth. I looked in my medical notes kept at the end of my hospital bed one day and saw multiple entries stating "Mum not complaining" – not a good

standard at all, and no-one actually took the time to ask me how I felt. It was a very vulnerable time for me.

Upon discharge I was going to make a formal complaint in writing, but I lacked the energy and willpower to do this with a new baby; and as time went on, I felt like I'd rather move on with my life, so I never bothered.

I suffered from postnatal depression and anxiety months afterwards, contributed to by this experience of postnatal care following a preterm birth, and by my breastfeeding journey not being adequately supported from birth.

19 March 2024