

**NATIONAL MOTHER AND BABY WEEK® 2011 (Mothering Sunday April
3rd – 10th)**

**Press Release - Mothers and babies need more
protection**

Baby Lifeline – The Mother and Baby Charity responds to the latest CEMACE findings (Centre for Maternal and Child Enquiries) into maternal death, covering a three year from 2006 to 2008, by calling for increased funding and priority for maternity health care professional education and training.

This report reveals that 70% of direct maternal deaths and 55% of indirect maternal deaths (where the mothers had an underlying medical condition) were associated with substandard care that contributed towards their deaths. Overall, there has been a small decline in maternal mortality but the report reveals that even with our healthcare system, up to 100 women die each year during or shortly after pregnancy. More worrying is the rise in deaths due to sepsis (infection) which is now the most common cause of direct death.

CEMACE has also produced the annual report into perinatal death, which demonstrates that although there is a reduction in stillbirth, almost one in every 100 births in the UK results in a stillbirth or neonatal death. Other findings not covered by this report, document babies who suffer brain damage during the birth process leading to cerebral palsy. This occurs in approximately 1 in 500 births and it is the most common serious disability of childhood, with children often needing lifelong care.

Preventable death and injury

Not all of these events can be prevented, but the continuing substandard care demonstrated by these reports means, we owe it to our mothers and babies to work to reduce those that can.

The CEMACE report notes that many of the critical incident reports prepared by the hospital staff and reviewed by them were generally of poor quality which led to a failure of the learning process and adequate changes being made.

With regard to cerebral palsy, it is estimated that a lack of oxygen during the birth process is the cause of injury in about 30% of cases. And this is often related to a failure to diagnose or act on fetal distress. The other 70% of cases are related to events that occur during pregnancy or resulting from prematurity and low birth weight. All of these things can be potentially improved by appropriate clinical intervention.

Openness not shared

Gill Edwards, a Partner and acknowledged clinical negligence expert at Manchester based law firm Pannone, is instructed by families of women and children who have died and children who have suffered brain injury due to substandard care. Commenting she said:

“Whilst the reports by CMACE are to be commended, the reports inevitably deal with historical cases and it is a great shame that the same openness and analysis is not shared with the parents and families of those affected at the time these events occur.

“Time and again we act for families who have not been given an explanation when things go wrong and they are forced to pursue litigation in order to get the answers they need. How many people are there who are still in the dark about the cause of their loved one’s death or injury, when we know from such reports that some are due to substandard care? This isn’t about a compensation culture; it is about acknowledging wrongdoing, accountability, improving standards and providing for families who are now without a mother and children who may need lifelong care, therapy and equipment because of their injuries.”

Edwin Chandharan - Lead Consultant Labour Ward & Lead for Clinical Governance, Executive Chair for Baby Lifeline Training said - “The 4th Confidential Enquiries into Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy (CESDI) in 1997 report highlighted that substandard care, especially with regard to knowledge in CTG interpretation (fetal monitoring), contributed to over 50% of intrapartum

Medical Officer's Report on Intrapartum Related Deaths in 2007 and NHS Litigation Authority Study on Stillbirth Claims in 2009 have also highlighted a continuing problem of CTG misinterpretation among midwives and obstetricians. In addition to death, many babies suffer hypoxic brain injury leading to cerebral palsy and learning difficulties due to substandard care.

Professor James Walker, Chairman of CMACE, Director of Baby Lifeline Training and Senior Vice-President of the RCOG said, "the CMACE reports on maternal and perinatal death highlights the ongoing failures in our maternity care systems but we should not underestimate the successes in reduced death over the years. However, it is important to highlight that the risks continue and the learning and improving practice is still required".

To change this ongoing tragedy we need to develop education and training that is more effective and based on physiology, pathophysiology, research and evidence, to equip clinicians with a better understanding of the underlying processes, particularly in maternal haemorrhage, hypertension and infection as well as interpreting CTG Traces. Competency testing in clinical care should be introduced across the U.K. to improve safety of mothers and babies in labour. Our risk management processes should be more accountable: whilst staff involved in adverse incidents should be well supported, it is equally important to demonstrate that learning from adverse incidents takes place and similar incidents are avoided in the future."

Baby Lifeline has an excellent and long standing track record of providing multidisciplinary healthcare cutting edge training to improve care. However it is increasingly finding that training budgets are slashed – particularly for midwives, and shortage of midwives and medical staff also makes attending training courses very difficult.

Having received an award the best educational programme in Ireland last year for its work on Cerebral Palsy, Baby Lifeline is again working in partnership with a top Maternity Hospital in Ireland (the Coombe Womens and Infants University Hospital) to develop specialist training for health and legal professionals internationally to realise a deeper understanding of the issues around the pregnancy and birth.

Cerebral palsy is one of the most challenging health and social issues of our time affecting 1 in 500 births.

Ends

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Information about Baby Lifeline

National Mother and Baby Week was created in 1994 and is registered to Baby Lifeline the charity.

The purpose of the week is to highlight the work in the maternity sector – caring for our future generations.

Baby Lifeline is a charity that supports the maternity sector. Born out of the Founder Judy Ledger's personal tragedy of losing three babies consecutively – all born prematurely, over £9 million has been raised to mainly provide equipment for maternity and special care baby units as well as a very strong focus on continuing professional development training for multidisciplinary health professionals and associated legal professionals.

Registered in 18981 Baby Lifeline is a UK premier provider of high quality, Multi - disciplinary training to clinicians, managers, administrators and lawyers involved in our maternity services to ensure the healthiest outcome possible from pregnancy and birth.

Awards and recognition have recently been bestowed upon Baby Lifeline and it's Founder Judy for ground breaking and innovative work which has enabled thousands of health professionals benefit from cutting edge and disseminated expertise, both in the UK and internationally.

See www.babylifeline.org.uk and www.babylifelinetraining.org.uk