Northern Ireland
Perinatal Mental Health
is Everyone’s Business

November 2017
Perinatal mental illnesses are very common, affecting more than 1 in 10 women at some point during the perinatal period.\(^1\) Examples of these illnesses include antenatal and postnatal anxiety and depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and postpartum psychosis. These conditions can develop suddenly and range from mild and moderate to extremely severe, requiring different kinds of care and/or treatment.

Perinatal mental illnesses are also of major importance as a public health issue, not just because of their adverse impact on the mother, but also because they can impact the emotional, cognitive and even physical development of the child, with potentially serious long-term consequences.\(^2\)

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE)\(^3\) clearly defines which services are needed for women affected by perinatal mental health illnesses, and in some parts of the UK, women receive world-class care.

However, in many areas perinatal mental illness goes unrecognised, undiagnosed and untreated, leading to avoidable suffering for women and their families.

All these problems warrant attention, whenever they occur in the perinatal period. The good news is that with the right help, women can recover from these illnesses – however, investment is required.

Current Gaps – specialist community perinatal mental health services in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has committed to implement the NICE Guidelines on Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health and produced the Integrated Perinatal Mental Health Care Pathway (Public Health Agency 2012) reviewed and updated July 2017 following RQIA review.

However, due to inadequate investment, women and their families face the stark and unacceptable situation of a postcode lottery in provision.

There is no specialist inpatient mother and baby unit in Northern Ireland, and indeed none on the island of Ireland, and only one specialist perinatal mental health service in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; education and support programmes by voluntary and community organisations are limited; and there is an inconsistent and inadequate approach within professional training.
UK specialist community perinatal mental health teams (current provision)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>COLOUR</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Perinatal community service operating throughout working hours with at least a specialist perinatal psychiatrist with dedicated time AND specialist perinatal mental health nurse with dedicated time, with access to a perinatal psychiatrist throughout working hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Specialist perinatal psychiatrist AND specialist perinatal nurse with dedicated time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Specialist perinatal psychiatrist or specialist perinatal nurse with dedicated time only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>No provision</td>
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Disclaimer: Details in this map and levels of provision have been assessed using the best information available at the time of printing. Please contact info@everyonesbusiness.org.uk if you suspect any inaccuracy.

Source: www.maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/campaign
Human costs of undiagnosed or untreated perinatal mental illnesses include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidable suffering</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can cause intense, debilitating, isolating and often frightening suffering for women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damage to families</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can have a long-term impact on a woman’s self-esteem and relationships with partners and family members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can have an adverse impact on the interaction between a mother and her baby, affecting the child’s emotional, social and cognitive development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide or serious injury</td>
<td>In severe cases, perinatal mental illness can be life-threatening. Suicide is a leading cause of death for women during pregnancy and in the year after giving birth.</td>
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Source: www.maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/campaign
Economic Costs of perinatal mental health problems

The costs of perinatal mental health problems report by the London School of Economics and Centre for Mental Health identified that perinatal mental health problems carry a total economic and social long-term cost to society of about £8.1 billion for each one-year cohort of births in the UK. Of these costs 28% relate to the mother and 72% relate to the child.

The cost to the public sector of perinatal mental health problems is 5 times the cost of improving services. If perinatal mental health problems were identified and treated quickly and effectively, serious and often life-changing human and economic costs could be avoided.

Urgent Northern Ireland needs:

In line with the Everyone’s Business Call to Act, Northern Ireland has specific needs to address the inequality of services:

• Specialist perinatal mental health community teams in the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts (only one has been developed in Belfast Trust – and even this is part-time)

• Development of a regional specialist mother and baby unit for Northern Ireland (there are none on the island of Ireland)

• National training strategy to ensure delivery of dedicated high quality training in perinatal mental health care for all health and social care professionals involved in the care of women during pregnancy and post pregnancy up to the first year after birth. This includes professionals working in the community and voluntary sector.

In addition to the Everyone’s Business Campaign Call to ACT, the Northern Ireland Perinatal Mental Health Forum is calling for:

• Specialist mental health midwives and joint obstetric clinics to be a requirement for each of the five Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) Northern Ireland

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) undertook a review of perinatal mental health service provision in Northern Ireland (January 2017), making 11 recommendations for improvement; the Regional Health and Social Care Board subsequently set up (June 2017) a working group under the “Maternity Strategy Implementation Group” to take forward all the 11 RQIA recommendations and any other identified areas of need.

Whilst it is encouraging to see RQIA’s recommendations, it is clear that these now need to be translated into action. Otherwise, women and families in Northern Ireland will continue – each and every day – to miss out on urgently required support and care.

Funding to provide specialist community perinatal mental health services in Northern Ireland

• The Rt Hon David Cameron MP (former Prime Minister), committed a total of £290 million for perinatal mental health services over the next 5 years to England (January 2016) in addition to £75 million committed by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne (Budget 2015)

• As a useful start, funding needs to be secured for Northern Ireland to develop sustainable specialist community perinatal mental health services through ring-fencing of funding pledged by David Cameron via the Barnett formula. Looking after mothers, babies and families is vital. If Northern Ireland was to receive a population matched sum through the Barnett formula – which was then ring-fenced – this would help improve Northern Ireland specialist community perinatal mental health services.

• The DUP’s coalition deal with the Conservative Party includes an additional £50m for mental health provision in Northern Ireland. It is now incumbent on politicians, Department of Health, Regional Health and Social Care Board and Health Care Trusts to ensure that perinatal mental health services receive funding also as part of this.
Northern Ireland Perinatal Mental Health Forum

The Northern Ireland Perinatal Mental Health Forum is part of the UK Maternal Mental Health Alliance and this briefing has been produced by the Northern Ireland Perinatal Mental Health Forum on behalf of the Maternal Mental Health Alliance’s Everyone’s Business campaign.

The aim of the Forum is to improve perinatal mental health services in Northern Ireland and membership includes: professional bodies, clinicians, voluntary and community organisations, and women and their families who have been directly impacted by these issues.6

Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA)

The Maternal Mental Health Alliance Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) is a UK wide coalition of national professional and patient organisations committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of women and their children in pregnancy and the first postnatal year.

To be added to the MMHA’s mailing list or to enquire about becoming a member, please contact the MMHA Everyone’s Business campaign, via Emily Slater, at info@everyonesbusiness.org.uk

UK picture

Welsh, English and Scottish governments are now responding actively to plug the gaps in specialist community perinatal mental health services. In Northern Ireland there is the need and the opportunity to go one step further by producing a strategy to ensure women across the whole nation have equitable access to safe, high quality care.

The extensive scientific evidence, as well as the guidance from NICE and SIGN (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network), show that these developments need urgent action.

We ask all on the Northern Ireland Executive to urgently address the current lack of provision and to set aside dedicated investment. The costs of perinatal mental illness are far too high to ignore.

Contact

Northern Ireland Perinatal Mental Health forum via Shona Hamilton: Shona.Hamilton@northerntrust.hscni.net

MMHA Everyone’s Business Campaign: info@everyonesbusiness.org.uk

1. The terms perinatal and maternal are often used interchangeably. But to avoid any confusion, we use the term perinatal when describing the mental illnesses that this campaign focuses on. Peri is the Latin for ‘around’, and natal is the Latin for ‘birth’. So perinatal mental illness refers to mental illness during pregnancy and one year after birth.

2. The Costs of Perinatal Mental Health Problems Oct 2014 The London School of Economics and The Centre for Mental Health


3. NICE Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health Guidelines

https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg192?unlid=5985059842015720221139


6. More information about the Northern Ireland Regional Perinatal Mental Health Forum, including a list of members, can be found at https://maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/nirpmhf/