
Tackling stigma around perinatal mental illness



By Professor Jane Melton, Director of Engagement and Integration with [2gether NHS Foundation Trust](#), Gloucestershire

[Mums and Babies in Mind](#) is working in Gloucestershire to support local leaders to improve perinatal mental health services. We asked Jane Melton about the campaign they have developed to help tackle stigma around perinatal mental illness.

1. Why did you decide to start a perinatal mental health anti-stigma campaign in Gloucestershire?

It is vital to tackle all mental health stigma, including stigma around perinatal mental illness. Stigma is often what prevents people from speaking out and seeking help. Women in the perinatal period need to feel able to speak up and seek help because of the deep and long lasting impact perinatal mental illness can have not only on mothers but also on

their children. Speaking out at an early stage can help to prevent mental health problems from becoming more serious.



2. Who initiated the work?

The drive to promote perinatal mental health and tackle stigma came from a number of directions. Even before Gloucestershire got funding to create a dedicated perinatal mental health team, clinical colleagues were keen to promote the support available through local NHS services as well as the community and voluntary sector. It also fitted naturally into our existing drive to tackle mental health stigma.

3. How have you sought to tackle the issue of stigma and discrimination around perinatal mental illness in Gloucestershire?



In Gloucestershire and Herefordshire we have a long history of tackling mental health stigma. The 2Gether NHS Foundation Trust has promoted this through its [‘Making Life Better’ initiative](#) and recently through joint work with the national [Time to Change](#) campaign. Gloucestershire also has a multi-agency, countywide group specifically set up to tackle mental health stigma among all sectors of our community. This group has worked on a wide range of initiatives, including very successfully working with local employers. Perinatal mental health is one area we have been focussing on over the past year.

Our 'tackling stigma' group includes all of the NHS providers in the county of Gloucestershire as well as local authorities and non-statutory bodies. NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group are key in these developments too. We've always ensured that our campaigns are supported by clinical experts and have involved 2Gether's perinatal mental health reference group in developing our campaign materials.

We have also involved experts by experience in our group. The group is co-chaired by an expert by lived experience who has had extensive experience of mental health issues. Our group also includes mums in a professional capacity who have had personal experience of mental health conditions.



4. What has your anti-stigma campaign involved so far?

Collectively we have produced a set of three postcards, which have been distributed to hospitals, clinics, GP surgeries, children's centres and other public spaces, such as baby shops. We have also created posters, used social media and created content for our websites. We have worked with the local media and also marked Infant Mental Health Awareness Week with stands in the Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. A new perinatal mental health leaflet and 'well woman' packs are in development, and these will be made widely available through health professionals, including health visitors and midwives. As a group we have also used the [Eastenders story line](#) about Stacey experiencing postpartum psychosis to highlight the condition to people in our local area.

5. What has been the effect of the campaign so far?

We know our materials have been well received and popular. We have also noticed that



colleagues from a wide range of agencies have taken interest in the work and as a result have started to look jointly at what more can be done to tackle stigma around perinatal mental illness. It feels like this is the beginning of a wider campaign.

6. What have been some of the challenges?

As with any multi-agency campaign, it has sometimes been a challenge to get agreement on messages, designs and approaches between all of the professionals involved. This hasn't prevented us from moving forward but it can make the process slightly slower. However, it is important that everyone is happy with what we are doing and the multi-agency approach ensures that every avenue is explored.

7. What advice do you have for other teams in the UK wanting to do similar work?



It is important to involve people in the work and to include a wide range of statutory and non-statutory agencies. Everyone has a different perspective to bring to the table. We also set up a small 'task and finish' group to work on various aspects of the campaign, such as the postcards. This meant that we could focus on just one aspect together.

8. How do you want to move this anti-stigma work forward in the future?

It feels like this is just the beginning of our work tackling stigma around perinatal mental illness. We are also still delivering our wider programme of tackling mental health stigma throughout our communities. In Gloucestershire we are constantly coming up with new ideas, visiting and presenting to new organisations and expanding our networks because we won't stop until all forms of mental health stigma are eliminated.

Tackling Stigma and Finding Support - postcards and posters (4.00 KB)

[View](#)

To download the resources mentioned in this post and to explore our other MABIM tools for leaders working in perinatal mental health visit:

www.maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/mumsandbabiesinmind/mabim-tools

[Mums and Babies in Mind](#) supports local leaders in four areas of England to improve care and quality of life for mums with mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year of life, and their babies.