

Puerperal Psychosis Panel News

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BIRMINGHAM MBU CELEBRATES ITS 5TH BIRTHDAY

The Mother & Baby Psychiatric Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital in Birmingham will be celebrating its 5th birthday on Friday 30th May 1997 .

We will be holding a 1 day event for mothers, their families and health professionals at the Midlands Arts Centre in Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston, Birmingham (opposite Warwickshire County Cricket Ground). The programme of events will be as follows :-

- 9.30 am arrivals
- 10.00 presentations about the Mother & Baby Unit, including a video of the Unit, followed by free discussion
- 12.30 pm childrens party and lunch (press photographers may be present at this part of the event)
- 2.00 pm divide into smaller groups for discussion.
- 3.00 pm brief Clinical presentations - this will involve doctors from Birmingham and from other specialised Mother & Baby units in other parts of the country explaining interesting cases they have treated. Everyone is welcome to listen although you may find it rather technical.

This will be a very special occasion and it would be nice to have the chance to meet some more panel members face to face. If you would like to come along, please return the booking form which is enclosed with this newsletter.

Panel reaches 200 members

Our panel of women who have suffered puerperal psychosis has now grown from an original core of 50 to 200 members from all over the country from Scotland to Cornwall and Wales to East Anglia. There has been a great response to items which appeared in the newsletters of The National Childbirth Trust, The Association for Post-Natal Illness and Meet-A-Mum Association and to articles in The Yorkshire Post and She Magazine. The panel has recently been featured in an article in the April issue of Parents Magazine.(if you want to know what I look like, they've published a photo of me with my children). Puerperal Psychosis was also featured in the February issue of Essentials although the panel wasn't mentioned.

Mother & Baby Unit Annual Review

I was delighted to meet 7 panel members face to face at the Annual Review which was held in December. In the morning, Professor Brockington and other members of

the unit presented various facts and figures about the service in the last year, including:

- the unit had 499 referrals in the year
- there were 77 in-patient admissions
- the mean length of stay for in-patients was 42 days
- there has been a waiting list for in-patients which suggests that more beds may be needed

About 50 people attended the meeting. In the afternoon, we split up into smaller groups for discussion. The group which I was in had about 20 people. 8 of us had suffered puerperal psychosis and there were also 2 male partners and the mother of 1 sufferer present. The rest were health visitors, student nurses, 1 midwife and 1 psychiatrist. I am afraid that as I was taking part in the discussion it was impossible to take notes as well, so I can't give you a lot of detail. We talked about our experiences of the illness and particularly about the continuing need that women and their families have for support after discharge from hospital. I felt that all those involved found the discussion worthwhile and I think it provided a real eye opener for the health professionals involved to hear about what it feels like to have puerperal psychosis.

Recurrent Puerperal Psychosis Interviews

The project involving in depth interviews with women who have suffered 2 or more episodes of puerperal psychosis is now continuing. Monica Doshi, a psychiatrist and Senior Registrar at the Mother & Baby Psychiatric Unit in Birmingham will analyse the information from all the interviews as part of her Phd project. 52 interviews have been done so far and we hope to do a further 20 before the project is completed. If you have already expressed an interest in taking part we will contact you eventually but it may take a while. Please be patient.

Lithium Prophylaxis Trial

11 patients have taken part in the lithium prophylaxis trial so far, including 1 from Australia. Initial results look promising. We will need at least 20 more patients to complete the trial. If you are pregnant and have previously suffered puerperal psychosis or manic depression please let us know if you are interested in finding out more about the trial.

MRI Scans and Neuro-imaging

Later this year we will be applying for funds to proceed with this project which will involve scanning the brains of women who have suffered puerperal psychosis and comparing the results with scans taken of their sisters who have children and have not been ill. A number of you have already expressed an interest in this project and we will contact you if and when funds are forthcoming.

World Psychiatric Association - Section for Womens Mental Health

The World Psychiatric Association has a Section for Womens Mental Health which now has 160 members from 40 different countries. It exists to promote womens mental health and to foster research worldwide. Members of the section will be starting a new medical journal "Archives of Womens Mental Health" which will be published for the first time in March 1998.

Its most recent newsletter included a summary of recent research carried out by members. This included 3 long term follow up studies of women who have suffered puerperal psychosis.

University Medical School of Pees in Hungary

This looked at 188 patients who were treated between 1936 and 1990 and compared those who became ill within 3 weeks of childbirth with those who became ill within 6 months. They found that outcomes were significantly better for those who became ill within the 1st 3 weeks.

Huddinge University Hospital , Sweden

This followed up all the mothers in Stockholm who gave birth to a child in 1976-7 and were admitted to a psychiatric department for the first time after the 20th week of pregnancy and within the 1st year after childbirth. They found that 52% suffered psychiatric problems at a later date also.

University of Halle , Germany

This study followed up 61 women with puerperal psychosis between 12 and 41 years later. They found that 63.9% had a least 1 further psychotic episode. 25.8% of those who had more children were ill again after childbirth. On the bright side, 72.1 % were well at the time of follow up.

These studies do seem to show that we are all at some risk of suffering further psychiatric problems in our lives. I did wonder whether or not to include this information in the newsletter as some people might find it alarming. I decided that on balance most people would prefer to have whatever information is available. I would welcome your views.