

## **NHS ‘fails suicidal new mothers’**

**Most primary care trusts are clueless about the number of mothers at risk of suicide after the birth of a child, the Patients Association claims**

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The Sunday Times Published: 6 March 2011



Nurse Joanne Bingley committed suicide after the birth of Emily Jane (Chris Bingley)

Potentially suicidal mothers with postnatal depression are suffering in silence and without treatment because of “disarray” in NHS services, according to a charity that monitors the performance of the health service.

An investigation by the Patients Association found that most primary care trusts (PCTs) had no idea how many women were at risk of suicide after the birth of a child.

Between 10% and 15% of mothers suffer from postnatal depression, with some cases ending in tragedy if not treated early enough.

Yet the association found that 78% of trusts did not know how many mothers in their area suffered from the illness, and 64% did not have plans for commissioning treatment. Furthermore, 45% did not know the number of incidents, such as suicide, related to the problem in their area.

Almost half (44%) are failing to implement four-year-old guidelines from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence that trusts should group together to offer such women specialist care. More than half fail to provide basic information on the condition.

Katherine Murphy, chief executive of the association, said: “Our report clearly shows that postnatal depression services are in disarray across the country.

“The government needs to act fast and issue clear guidelines on how they are going to help mothers who are needlessly suffering in silence without the information and support they need.”

Murphy added: “Without early detection and treatment, postnatal depression can in extreme and rare cases lead to suicide.

“It is alarming that primary care trusts are not only failing to provide information, but that many do not even know the number of serious untoward incidents that are due to postnatal depression.”

Fern Britton, the TV presenter, who suffered from postnatal depression and is backing the campaign, said she was shocked by the lack of information given to new mothers.

She said: “I support the Patients Association’s call to action for all PCTs to provide information for women and have services in place for treating postnatal depression.”

The association commissioned the report after the suicides of several new mothers had led to allegations of NHS neglect of postnatal depression.

One of these was Joanne Bingley, 39, a nurse from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, who gave birth to a daughter, Emily Jane, last year after a history of fertility problems. After struggling with breastfeeding, she became clinically depressed, killing herself when Emily Jane was 10 weeks old.

An independent inquiry into her death, commissioned by Kirklees NHS trust, found numerous opportunities when the NHS could have helped her but failed to do so.

Her husband, Chris, 43, an accountant, said the failures were “tragic and shocking”.

He called for “rapid and complete implementation of the policies and guidelines required to prevent such catastrophic events happening again”.

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