

Bereavement Care Audit findings on staffing

Introduction

In Spring 2022, we conducted a survey to understand what is happening in bereavement care following pregnancy loss or the death of a baby in NHS trusts and boards across the UK.

The survey was open between 25 February and 4 April 2022. 117 NHS trusts and boards completed it, which we estimate to be 74% of trusts and boards delivering care to families who experience pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

We asked questions about posts or hours within posts dedicated to bereavement care for families following pregnancy loss or the death of a baby and the responsibilities of these staff. The questions asked can be found [here](#).

Key findings

- 12% of trusts and boards who responded to our survey across the UK have no bereavement specialist working in the maternity service
- The average number of full-time equivalent staff working in a bereavement specialist role across all maternity units, foetal medicine units and neonatal care units is just over 1 which breaks down as just over half a bereavement specialist for each fetal medicine or neonatal unit and just under 1 for each maternity unit – this is not enough.

Nation	Number of trust/board responses	Total bereavement specialists	Trust/boards with no bereavement specialists	No. maternity units (avg.)	No. FMU & NICU (avg.)	Total FTE (avg.)	Total FTE per FMU/NICU	FTE per mat unit
UK	115	131.44	14 (12% of trusts that responded)	1.61	1.63	1.15	0.59	0.82
England	97	117.73	9 (9%)	1.49	1.71	1.23	0.59	0.90
Northern Ireland	4	5.22	0	2.00	1.00	1.31	1.31	0.65
Scotland	9	4.16	4 (44%)	1.89	1.22	0.46	0.21	0.25
Wales	5	4.42	1 (20%)	3.20	1.40	0.87	0.63	0.43

*Average %FTE per unit is the total %FTE for all bereavement midwives in a Trust divided by the number of maternity units in that Trust; specialist unit refers to FMUs and NICUs (one hospital might have one maternity unit, one FMU and one NICU in which case %FTE for

specialist units would be half that of maternity units)

England

- 9% of trusts and boards who responded to our survey in England have no bereavement specialist working in the maternity service
- The average number of full-time equivalent staff working in a bereavement specialist role across all maternity units, foetal medicine units and neonatal care units is 1.2 which breaks down as two-thirds of a bereavement specialist for each fetal medicine or neonatal unit and just under 1 for each maternity unit – this is not enough.
- When we compared these staffing numbers against baby deaths rates in the trusts who responded (for the last year for which data is available from MBRRACE-UK, 2019) we estimate that **each bereavement specialist has just two hours working time to dedicate to each death**, including all aspects of the role, including supporting families directly. There is reason to believe that the current picture may be even worse with an upward trend in stillbirths and midwives leaving the profession since 2019.

*Please see next page for findings on roles of bereavement specialist staff.

Roles of specialist staff

Nation	% of bereavement specialists Leading on the development of the (NBCP)	Regularly gathering and reviewing families/staff feedback	Assessing the quality and consistency of bereavement care	Implementing ongoing improvement plans	Leading on the Perinatal Mortality Review Tool	Delivering bereavement care training for other maternity staff	Organising external bereavement care training	Ensuring that the necessary paperwork is completed for all perinatal deaths on maternity units across the Trust	Ensuring that all maternity staff are aware of and familiar with all paperwork and guidelines relating to perinatal death	Ensuring ongoing support to parents after they have left hospital is offered	Ensuring additional support to bereaved parents in any subsequent pregnancies is offered
UK	72	78	77	79	51	83	52	83	89	88	77
England	77	79	79	82	55	86	55	82	89	89	80
Northern Ireland	75	100	100	100	25	100	50	100	100	100	100
Scotland	44	56	44	33	33	33	22	67	89	78	44
Wales	20	80	80	80	40	100	60	100	80	80	60

In addition to for caring for families the majority of bereavement specialists are also have many other responsibilities including training staff in bereavement, paperwork, gathering feedback, assessing quality of bereavement care in their trust, implementing improvement plans, complying with national guidance on reporting baby deaths and the care of mothers and babies.