The South Wales Programme

A briefing about neonatal care

Neonatal care is for newborn premature or sick full-term babies who need medical and/or surgical support. It is essential these babies are treated in a neonatal unit, staffed by experienced and highly-skilled clinicians. This might not necessarily be the nearest local hospital.

There are three levels of neonatal care:

**Special care baby units** - for new born babies who require a little extra care or observation (also known as level one neonatal care)

**High dependency** – a specialist unit for ill newborn and premature babies who do not require intensive care (also known as level two neonatal care)

**Intensive care** – a specialist unit for seriously-ill newborn and premature babies (also known as level three neonatal care).

Neonatal care is currently provided across South Wales in a number of hospitals which provide some or all of the levels of neonatal care:

- University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff—all levels
- Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport—all levels
- Singleton Hospital, Swansea—all levels
- Royal Glamorgan Hospital, Llantrisant—levels one and two
- Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil—levels one and two
- Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny—levels one and two
- Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend—levels one and two

Neonatal intensive care (level three) provision will not change under the South Wales Programme proposals – it will continue to be provided in Cardiff, Swansea and Gwent. Level two neonatal care will be based in the **four or five** hospitals which provide consultant-led maternity care in the future.

The South Wales Programme is about **CONCENTRATING** where neonatal care is provided.

It is not about **REDUCING** access to it.
The all-Wales neonatal network

This network was set up in autumn 2010 and brings together NHS health professionals and partners from all NHS organisations, to ensure equitable, high quality and clinically-effective neonatal care is available to babies and their families in Wales.

The network’s main aim is to ensure mothers and babies are cared for in a unit appropriate to their needs, as close to their home as possible. It also supports and monitors the implementation of the all-Wales neonatal standards.

This arrangement allows all the units to work together across health board boundaries to improve the standards of neonatal care and support each other in the provision of care for babies across health communities when required.

Current capacity and demand pressures on neonatal services

There has been a major increase in demand for neonatal intensive and high dependency care in South Wales between 2011 and 2012 because of a significant rise in the number of extremely premature babies being born. These babies need prolonged stays in neonatal units and a high degree of care.

There have been times of severe pressure when babies have had to be
transferred to alternative units— in Wales and England—to ensure they receive the appropriate care and treatment they require.

Despite these pressures, the neonatal network has supported the development of a range of improvements—these will continue to be important in the implementation of the South Wales Programme. These include:

Implementation and monitoring of the all-Wales neonatal standards, which include staffing levels, access, facilities, patient experience, transport and education and training

**Neonatal transfer transport service** – this is a dedicated service designed to move babies safely from one hospital to another for specialised or ongoing care and exists to make sure the transfer is as safe and efficient as possible. This will continue to be needed in the implementation of the South Wales Programme.

**Cot capacity** - determining how many cots Wales needs to meet demand is one of the network’s most important roles. There has been a modest overall improvement in the number of cots available. The third capacity review shows South Wales needs four more intensive care cots and three additional high dependency cots to meet average occupancy standards of 70%. The network and the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee are working with all the Welsh health boards to identify additional capacity in the short term to meet these pressures.

**Workforce** – neonatal staffing continues to be a major challenge but there has been some modest improvements in nurse staffing levels. The nursing shortfall has fallen by almost 50% but medical recruitment remains difficult. The South Wales Programme’s proposals to concentrate level two neonatal care in four or five hospitals will help units comply with the medical staffing requirements

**Cot locator** – this allows neonatal units to work together and support each other if babies need to be transferred. It provides at-a-glance information about capacity across the network and help units plan transfers and the return of babies to their home unit.

**Working with parents and Bliss** – the network works closely with the charity Bliss and it has developed an action plan to set up a parent-led community, including a website for parents about neonatal services in Wales and the support available.

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Demand for neonatal care has increased over the last few years, which has impacted on units’ ability to comply with medical and nursing staff standards.

The development of the neonatal network has supported organisations working across boundaries to improve the level of care provided despite these pressures. Importantly it has provided a wealth of knowledge and information about how care is currently being provided and required.

This is key to informing service planning and proposed reconfiguration. The neonatal network is actively involved in the South Wales Programme and its role will continue to be important in its implementation after the public consultation, to ensure mothers and babies are cared for safely in a unit appropriate to their needs, as close to home as possible.

The South Wales Programme is a public consultation about the future of consultant-led maternity and neonatal care; inpatient children’s services and emergency medicine (A&E) for people living in South Wales and South Powys.

The four options for their location are:

Option 1: University Hospital of Wales (UHW), Cardiff; Morriston Hospital, Swansea; Specialist and Critical Care Centre (SCCC), a new hospital planned to be built in Cwmbran and Prince Charles Hospital, in Merthyr Tydfil

Option 2: UHW; Morriston Hospital; SCCC and Royal Glamorgan Hospital, in Llantrisant

Option 3: UHW; Morriston Hospital; SCCC; Prince Charles Hospital and Princess of Wales Hospital, in Bridgend.

Option 4: UHW; Morriston Hospital; SCCC; Prince Charles and Royal Glamorgan hospitals

The consultation ends on Friday July 19, 2013

FULL DETAILS ABOUT THE SOUTH WALES PROGRAMME ARE AVAILABLE AT www.wales.nhs.uk/swp