

Tess White MSP submission of 14 June 2023

PE2017/B: Extend the period that specialist perinatal mental health support is made available beyond one year

I have supported my constituents Margaret Reid and her sister regarding the difficult and traumatic issues raised in PE2017 since February 2022. I have permission from Ms Reid and her sister to share details of their story in this submission.

Ms Reid's sister was sectioned in Carseview Hospital in NHS Tayside and separated from her children after she experienced a frightening relapse in her postpartum psychosis. This was following successful treatment in a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) in Livingston, although she was treated miles from her home in the North of Scotland. When Ms Reid's sister's condition got worse, she could not be admitted to a Mother and Baby Unit for a second time because her child was too old.

Transition to general adult services in NHS Tayside

The perinatal period refers only to pregnancy and the first 12 months after childbirth. For many mothers with mental ill-health, the 12-month mark is a precipice where the nature of support changes or falls away.

Ms Reid's sister found that the transition from perinatal mental health services to adult mental health services was abrupt and distressing. It was also very hard for her family, who felt isolated and received little contact from staff. Ms Reid had to drive to the facility to speak to clinical staff in person about her sister's condition and treatment, which is why she is calling for a family liaison function in mental health units.

Ms Reid shared with me that her sister was "frightened, confused, and very, very scared" in the mental health unit, which deals with every type of mental ill health. Her experience in Carseview was profoundly different to the Mother and Baby Unit, and she felt that Carseview did not offer the "healthy environment" she needed to get better and focus on her recovery. Crucially, she was separated from her young daughter.

The Independent Inquiry into Mental Health Services in NHS Tayside by Dr David Strang, published in July 2020, recognised that "the physical space, fabric, decoration and atmosphere at Carseview Centre are not

conducive to a welcoming and safe space.” The inquiry also found that patients reported that “their interactions with others on the wards...have been difficult and, at times, frightening.”

A report published in January 2023 by the Independent Oversight and Assurance Committee on progress towards implementing Dr Strang’s 49 recommendations found that NHS Tayside had failed to fully rectify 31 of the 49 issues identified.

Extending the period that specialist mental health support is made available

The Scottish Parliament’s Health, Social Care and Sport (HSCS) Committee’s 2021 inquiry into perinatal mental health recommended that mental health support “...should not be restricted to the one-year period following the birth of a child”.

The Scottish Government acknowledged the recommendation from the HSCS Committee, highlighting that it is considering the parameters for perinatal mental health support with the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board. This is welcome, but the Programme Board concluded in March 2023 and no clear progress has been made towards the implementation of this recommendation. No new oversight announcements have been made and the Scottish Government has advised that these are still “under development”.

In the meantime, the Scottish Government has not yet responded to the Scottish Mental Health Law Review Final Report, which was published in September 2022. One of the report’s recommendations addressed issues around access to maternal mental health treatment, recommending that: “The duty in section 24 of the Mental Health Act to support mothers in hospital with postnatal depression and similar conditions should be broadened to ensure a wider range of in-patient and community supports for parents who need perinatal mental health care and their children.”

While recognition that maternal mental ill-health is not restricted to the first twelve months of motherhood is welcome, the slow pace of change demonstrated by the Scottish Government is a source of frustration and concern for my constituent.

Research from the Maternal Mental Health Alliance

A new report from the Maternal Mental Health Alliance published in May 2023 shows that only 14 per cent of health boards in Scotland offer the

highest standard of specialist perinatal mental health teams. That is the equivalent of two health boards – NHS Lothian and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Women living outside big population centres and the Central Belt are having to contend with the reduced availability of perinatal mental health care services.

The report also found that 46 per cent of health boards predicted there would be an underspend against their estimated budget for 2022-23, with recruitment issues highlighted as the main reason for the underspend. These recruitment challenges and their impact on the delivery of perinatal and infant mental health services are extremely concerning.

Mother and Baby Units

There are only two Mother and Baby Units in Scotland's Central Belt, each with six beds. This puts women in the North of Scotland at a geographical disadvantage – they can access treatment in the MBUs, but they must leave their older children and family support system behind.

While it is positive that a recent consultation showed overwhelming support for an MBU in the North East, the Scottish Government must take urgent action to take this forward and make it a reality. Consideration should also be given to capacity in MBUs for mothers with older and mobile babies, as there is anecdotal evidence that MBUs cannot adequately accommodate them in some cases.

I thank the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for its consideration of PE2017.