

Anonymous – 10 February 2021

Hi, I'm writing to share my experiences of maternity and postnatal care. I have two children aged 3.5 years and 7 months. I apologise in advance for the length of this email but my experience this time round has impacted my mental health so seriously that I feel I need to provide this information.

My antenatal care other than appointments occasionally running late has not been of issue other than some less than friendly staff during scans the second time round, making an already stressful experience during the current pandemic slightly less enjoyable. However, my experience on maternity ward and after giving birth have been less than desirable.

Firstly, I believe the maternity ward to be wholly inadequate and outdated. I suffer severe anxiety and not being able to have a private room (which I'm more than happy to pay for), especially after suffering a spinal headache leaving me bedridden for the better part of a week, was extremely stressful. The ward is hot and loud and lacks much needed privacy after giving birth / having a caesarean, the bays are so small there is barely room to fit both your husband and new baby.

The staff for the most part are very helpful however there is a serious lack of education around breastfeeding and especially the identification of tongue and lip ties which cause serious issues to a babies breastfeeding ability. I breastfed my first child for 2.5 years with no thanks to the support received from any of the professionals here. I was told his latch looked great and left to suffer through bleeding nipples, excruciating pain and recurrent mastitis because no one can identify a posterior tongue tie. When I visited the "breastfeeding buddies" group, the woman running it had never had a child nor breastfed and so was not in any position to be giving advice on the subject to struggling mothers.

My second baby I immediately knew had both a tongue and lip tie but was told by the paediatricians that she didn't and off we were sent to struggle on. I asked my health visitor about it and was referred to the breastfeeding "specialist" who told me my baby was lazy and my nipples were too big and to try certain positions (that were not actually suitable for us due to an oversupply). I was told she would email me videos/information about these feeding positions but the email never came. She also said there is no proof that lip and posterior tongue ties affect breastfeeding which is incorrect.

Again I was left to struggle on alone because my baby was gaining weight well despite projectile vomiting after every feed (thanks to my abundance of milk). My baby then went on a week long nursing strike because of the impact that the ties were having on her ability to nurse, we haven't recovered from this. My supply plummeted, my baby lost 2kg and she now has severe negative associations with nursing which means every single feed is a struggle. At 5 months I paid almost £1000 out of pocket to see a specialist in London (in the middle of a pandemic as a person considered at risk) and had both posterior tongue and lip ties confirmed and revised. However the damage was done and we continue to struggle with negative associations because the ties were ignored for so long. I now have to take medication to maintain my milk supply (which I have to obtain privately) and suffer severe postnatal depression which I have to see a private psychiatrist for as I was told I'd be waiting months to

see anyone through the states and I could barely mother my children because of the state I was in.

When my milk supply dwindled I called my health visitor hoping to get tubing for a supplemental nursing system so I could give her expressed milk while nursing to encourage my milk supply, they didn't know what I was talking about and told me to call maternity ward. I did this and was told no they don't provide this because at 5 months my baby should be breastfeeding or taking a bottle so clearly again, they had no idea what I was talking about. I spoke to the breastfeeding "specialist" again at this point and she commented in a rather rude tone "is it fair to say that correcting the ties hasn't helped then?", a comment that was inappropriate and unnecessary, really upset me and is not true in the slightest as my babies latch has improved 100% however her negative psychological associations are now deeply ingrained thanks to her initial ignorance.

It is only due to pure stubbornness, personal research and determination that I'm still breastfeeding my 7 month old but the cost of all of it has been my mental health and that is 100% due to the lack of knowledge among the professionals here.

I believe you need to invest in maternity and mental health on the whole but especially breastfeeding support. Successful breastfeeding leads to healthier children and mothers both physically and mentally and so will relieve pressures on other areas of the healthcare system in the long run. You are failing all mothers and babies on the island by providing completely inadequate support. I am extremely lucky that I can afford to pay for care privately but many cannot and rely on that provided by the government and I feel extremely sorry for them.