

Bella Molloy – 9 February 2021

I'm so pleased to hear there is finally a review. The maternity ward has remained inadequate since it was opened in the 80s/90s.

The first time I stayed in maternity for the birth of my son was 4 years ago. My epidural was inserted badly by a junior member of staff and the birth ended in a c section after 42 hours of labour. I contracted a deep infection in surgery and was then isolated in hospital for a week at the end of the corridor. The midwives offered a lot of differing advice and I found my mental health declined quickly as a new mum. I asked 3 times to see my medical notes and a review of the birth so I could come to terms with the traumatic experience but this never happened. I was assessed by mental health and given an increased dose of antidepressants to leave hospital with.

Four years later I stayed in maternity for a week after the birth of my daughter in October last year and the place was dreary, outdated and not fit for purpose. The COVID restrictions just exacerbated the issues there. The mental health care is extremely outdated. The lack of fresh air, daylight and inability to chat to any other mums (never mind without visitors) is enough to drive anyone mad. The staff work under extremely difficult conditions and I really felt for the midwives, many of whom don't have the energy after long shifts to fight for their right to a pleasant working environment. I hope whomever has submitted the plans for a new maternity unit has taken note of birthing centres in the UK and France. We are, as usual, so far behind the times.

The midwives this time were fantastic but I had to beg to be allowed out for a walk because my daughter was unable to leave due to an infection. I was kept away from my son for a week and remained in one room, apart from for a shower. The rooms lack any comforts for mothers or partners. What I saw of the staff room was appalling. The times I did feel low I was offered more antidepressants by consultants and a referral to MASH, all of which I declined. It is a slippery slope. I fought for 4 years to reduce my medication and knew that it wasn't required. What I did require was some connection, some other mothers to share my experience with, some better sleep, some fresh air and vitamin D. None of which I could access on the maternity ward.

My daughter wasn't poorly enough for sepsis but still had to remain in hospital for a week and it was down to one lovely nurse who eventually cared for her whilst I signed myself out for a walk across the road. I felt under duress and had to beg many members of staff to be allowed to leave. The food was absolutely appalling most days and lacked basic nutrition (which should be a prerequisite for breastfeeding).

I had a planned c section this time and the surgery and all of the staff in surgery were extremely professional. I couldn't have felt more at ease on the day of my daughter's birth. The midwives were caring and extremely supportive.

I chatted with several midwives whom admitted they felt overwhelmed at the prospect of ever fighting for better working environment. For any comforts for staff and mothers.

Please, please dont let this maternity unit fall short again. When it moved from le bas centre it should have been for the benefit of mothers and the new generations not just for convenience and yet I know of mothers who speak of how wonderful the old place was. Please remember that maternity is where motherhood starts for all mothers. It is where we bring our babies into the world and it is the start of our journey. For many of us it shapes the first months of our experience, which then go onto shape our childrens early years. It is through the strength of women that so many mothers have survived these times but it shouldn't be a case of survival. We as a society should be supporting new mothers to have the best experience possible.

I urge you to look into other ways you can support the mental health of new mums to include care packages. Look up letters of light, an incredible uk based charity who I'm sure would be willing to support the new unit. Peer mentoring or doulas where midwives are unable to pick up some of the needs of mums and dads because of workloads. Better connections with antenatal department, community midwives, GPs, perinatal mental health team, charities, NCT.

Consider the basics, soft lighting, fans for all the mothers, a kitchen for the partners, permanent birthing pools, soft furnishings, inspirational pictures and quotes on the walls from mothers throughout history, mood lighting, sensory room. En suite facilities. Plants. Flowers at reception. The possibilities are endless.