

Spring Newsletter - April 2009

Message from the Chair

Well Spring has finally sprung and I'm now, like many of you I'm sure, having to explain to a four year old why it is still 'morning' when he goes to bed! Still, the longer days and hopefully warmer weather, mean lots of relaxing evenings in the garden and the smell of BBQs filling the air.

We have had a busy few months in the BTA and also a small change on the committee. Nilmini de Silva, our political officer, has decided to step down from her position due to increasing external work commitments. We are all very grateful for the work that Nil put in during her time on the committee and wish to thank her for her dedication and commitment to the BTA. We have recently advertised for new committee members and will be meeting with the shortlisted candidates in due course.

I was honoured to be invited to The Speaker's House at the House of Commons back in October last year, to attend the Kings Fund 'Safer Births' initiative reception. It was a fascinating evening and I spoke with some very interesting representatives from a wide range of organisations. I felt very privileged to be a part of the event, in such wonderful surroundings, and look forward to being involved as the next phase of work commences.

We now have a Facebook group with some very active discussion boards and interesting debates. If you wish to talk with others who have experienced birth trauma and understand how you are feeling, please do try and join the group. Whilst we try to monitor the group on a regular basis, it is not possible to be online 24-hours a day, so if you see a post which you find offensive in any way, please send an email to me for review with details of where you saw it. It is worth noting that the views expressed on the discussion boards are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Birth Trauma Association, however, we are always pleased to advise you via email if there is something you are unsure of. You can find out how to join the group on the next page.

Finally, the third national Birth Trauma Awareness Day takes place this year on Saturday 15th August. If you have any ideas for fundraising events please get in touch as we would love to hear them. We will be posting further information on the website nearer the time.

Fingers crossed for a warm and sunny summer for us all!

Take Care

Jules - jules@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk



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Vaginal Prolapse... A Personal Story

In 2007 I was diagnosed with a prolapse. I had been to see my GP for my daughter's 6 week check and asked if I could be checked too as something hadn't felt 'quite right' since her birth. Sure enough, the GP confirmed a prolapse – I made an assumption it was my bladder as I had some urinary symptoms such as urge incontinence and some leaking.

Eventually I had a physiotherapy referral come through and attended several sessions where we spoke about pelvic floor muscles and posture. I also lost 2 stone in weight which helped.

Unfortunately, the return of periods brought with it the return of my prolapse symptoms. Every month I spend a week with not only PMT but a sensation of a head crowning – literally a burning pain 'down below' as the weight of my uterus pushes down on my vaginal prolapse. I can no longer wear tampons as they are pushed out, and as for sex, well let's just say the sterilisation was a waste of time as we've not been able to 'try it out' so to speak!

A return visit to my GP left me sobbing and begging for a hysterectomy, I told her I was fed up of waddling like a duck for a week each month and the pain and chronic fatigue was really bringing me down. She arranged for me to see a gynaecologist.

I am now on the waiting list for an anterior repair. My vaginal wall has sagged and needs to be repaired and tightened back up. I am not worried about spending up to a week in hospital, the discomfort, or the six week recovery period, as I am sure it will be worth it to reclaim my life. However, I do wish there was more support for those of us who have suffered prolapse – it doesn't seem to be spoken about at all and I am yet to find any online support groups.

Do you know of any support groups for those suffering from prolapse? Or would you like to be put in touch with other mums that understand how you feel?

If so, please get in touch with us at:
enquiries@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

BTA Attends Kings Fund 'Safer Births' Reception

Julie Orford, Chair of the Birth Trauma Association, and Treasurer Maureen Treadwell, attended a reception set in the beautiful State Rooms of the Speakers House in the House of Commons on 29th October.

The reception was to launch the 'Safer Births' initiative – a project to improve the safety of maternity services which is being undertaken by the Kings Fund. Besides the speaker, there were representatives from the Health Care Commission, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives and the Patient Safety Agency. The reception marked the beginning of the next phase of work on the safety of Maternity Services and the BTA representatives were able to network with researchers from the Kings Fund and to press the case for maternity services to give more consideration to emotional and psychological health.



Find out more about the report by visiting:
<http://tinyurl.com/2rrrpr>

BTA Now on Facebook

The Birth Trauma Association have recently set-up a Closed Facebook Group. The original aim of the group was to raise awareness of birth trauma and to let people know we are here to offer support if need be. However, the group has only been going for a couple of months but already has an established community with regular posts on the discussions boards which is very encouraging to see.

There are currently over 200 members signed up. To join, you will need to be a registered user of Facebook.



You can find the group by searching for 'Birth Trauma Association'. Your request to join will be sent through to the BTA Admin team who will then approve your request to join the group.

Originally the group was an open group that anyone could join/read, but we found that group members felt more comfortable talking about their feelings and experiences within a closed community, hence the change, all new members now have to be approved to access the group. We hope you find this a useful way to communicate with other parents who have experienced birth trauma.

An Overview of the CEMACH Conference

Richard Congdon, chief executive of CEMACH, gave a broad overview of the work of CEMACH and its surveillance programme. There has been no decline in maternal death rates over several decades. Whether this is due to better ascertainment, more substandard care, chance or an obstetric population with more risk factors is not yet clear. There is, however, very significant correlation between social deprivation, obesity and unemployment. He provided a list of ten key recommendations that need to be addressed and emphasised the importance of Trusts ensuring that clinical staff learn from any critical events and serious untoward incidents.

Kate Fitzimons gave a presentation on the CEMACH obesity project which aims to identify the clinical interventions which would help to improve outcomes for women with obesity and their babies. Unit specific reports will be available in 2010.

Professor Michael de Swiet talked about the commonest cause of maternal death in the most recent triennium; cardiac disease. He emphasised the need for clinicians to pay attention to breathlessness and chest pain and to understand that coronary syndrome can present with atypical features in pregnancy such as epigastric pain and vomiting.

Probably the most moving talk of the day was given by Ben Palmer, founder of Jessica's Trust. www.jessicatrust.org.uk

Ben's wife tragically died of childbed fever and he recounted the events leading up to her death and recalled the moments where different decisions might have led to a different outcome. He described the impact of his wife's death on his family and his determination to publicise the symptoms of childbed fever so that fewer people in future would suffer what he and his family had experienced.

A very moving account was also given by a senior midwife from the Shrewsbury Hospital who described the impact of a maternal death from the perspective of health care professionals.

Promoting Normality

The BTA has been involved in the controversial debate about Promoting Normality – the consensus statement on normal birth.



The statement calls for a standard definition for normal labour and birth so that normal birth rates can be audited and compared with confidence.

The MCWP (Maternity Care Working Party) is recommending that all maternity services:

- Use the same definition of normal birth
- Collect and publish normal birth statistics
- Regularly take action to increase the normal birth rate towards a realistic objective of 60%, with measurable improvement taking place by 2010.

The Information Centre for the NHS in England has adopted a working definition for normal labour and birth which they call 'normal delivery'. The definition is: *"without induction, without the use of instruments, not by caesarean section and without general, spinal or epidural anaesthetic before or during delivery"*

This means the document, which is being implemented by trusts, is targeting 60% of births to be without a number of interventions, including epidural. Many women do not want epidurals but a considerable number do, and we have argued that providing the woman has information about the risks and benefits, then the decision should be hers.

A large number of women who go on to develop PN PTSD have been traumatised by severe unendurable pain. Unfortunately, we have not yet got the perfect solution; a risk free way of eliminating labour pain for those women that want it. However, the risks from epidurals are actually very small. They are listed on the obstetric anaesthetists website and there is also a link to further information:

Epidural Information Card
<http://tinyurl.com/cx95xk>

The BTA are to meet with health care professionals, user groups, politicians and health care professionals in Parliament during May 2009. We will keep you posted!

To read the full consensus statement visit:
<http://tinyurl.com/day697>

Meet the Committee

Ever wondered what the Committee behind the BTA are like? This new addition to the newsletter aims to give you a bit of a clue as to who they are, what they do and why they became involved with the BTA in the first place.



Name: Annie Davidson
Role: Press Officer
Age: 32
Location: Essex
'Day' Job: Reporter
Children: Two sons aged four and six
Hobbies: Reading, cinema, being with my family and friends

Why did you become involved with the BTA?

After the traumatic birth of my first baby in 2003, there was little, if any, support out there for mums who felt like me.

I now believe I was suffering from Post Natal PTSD (PN PTSD) although it was never diagnosed. I found an Internet forum, which BTA co-founder Debbie Sayers also posted on, she persuaded the administrators of the site to give us our own 'difficult birth' board where we all got to know each other a bit better.

Debbie was then in the process of setting up the BTA with our Secretary, Maureen Treadwell, and I got involved doing what I could to help from that point.

What's the best part about being involved with the BTA?

It's just lovely to know that we can be there for women, point them in the right direction to find help, and be there for them as they come to terms with what they have experienced.

I feel birth trauma is still not widely understood so I am pleased that we are working towards, hopefully, changing that, although of course an important part of our work is trying to prevent it happening in the first place.

Meet the Committee (Cont'd)

Anything you find particularly frustrating?

I wish we had unlimited resources!

We only have a small committee - although we are recruiting for new members at the moment - and all of us are volunteers with other jobs and families.

It would be wonderful to have a lot more funding, with our own office and staff who could devote themselves to the issue but that is probably a good few years away yet!

What work do you carry out for the BTA?

I am one of the press team along with Maureen, which involves responding to press enquiries as well as trying to pro-actively send out our own press releases on relevant issues.

As the committee is small, we all do a bit of everything, for example I have attended a meeting with the National Childbirth Trust to discuss policies, as well as answering emails from women needing support and advice. We all do a little bit of everything.

Media Volunteers Needed...

The BTA has had masses of media coverage recently. We have been featured in the Times, Telegraph, Daily Mail, Sky, Radio 4's 'Today' programme, P&B magazine and Woman's Hour, as well as helping with a couple of documentaries which should be released later in the year. Publicity is an important way of getting our key messages across; that individual women must be listened to, their wishes respected and standards of maternity care and perinatal mental health services improved.

We urgently need more women prepared to speak to the media about their experiences of childbirth trauma. Please get in touch if you can help.

BTA Website Visitors

October 2008	7,910	Unique Visitors
November 2008	8,250	Unique Visitors
December 2008	6,896	Unique Visitors
January 2009	8,322	Unique Visitors
February 2009	7,427	Unique Visitors
March 2009	8,854	Unique Visitors

Our New Leaflet Finally Goes To Print!



We are pleased to announce that our new leaflet has finally gone to print, after we were able to secure funding to cover the print costs from various sources. You may remember this being mentioned in our newsletter back in August 2007!

The new leaflet is even bigger than first planned and was written with the help of Midwife Angela Leach and Dr. Kirstie McKenzie-McHarg, Clinical Research Psychologist.

Information in the leaflet includes:

- About the Birth Trauma Association
- What is Birth Trauma?
- What is Post Natal PTSD?
- What are the symptoms of Post Natal PTSD?
- Isn't this Post Natal Depression (PND)?
- How is PN PTSD treated?
- Should I Risk Another Pregnancy?
- I'm pregnant again and feeling scared, what can I do?
- Birth Plan Discussion
- An Example Birth Plan Discussion
- Where can I get help if I think this is me?

We are initially having 20,000 leaflets printed to hand out to hospitals, midwives, health visitors and GPs. If you would like a stock of leaflets to use, or would like a copy for yourself, please get in contact with us at: jules@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

A PDF version of the leaflet can also be found on our website publications page:
www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/publications.htm

Can You Help Us With The Comic Relief Project?

Would you be interested in helping with the BTA Comic Relief project? We still need more recruits to help with this project which aims to promote more understanding of mental health issues around childbirth. It won't require an enormous time commitment – probably no more than a couple of hours each month.



Thanks to the Comic Relief grant we are able to cover childcare and travel for a couple of training meetings. We hope this will lead to more representation for perinatal mental health issues on Maternity Services Liaison Committees (MSLCs) and hopefully help prevent some of the practices that can give rise to unnecessary trauma around childbirth. If you can help with the project, please email: enquiries@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

For further information about MSLCs visit: www.mslc.org.uk

Special Thanks To...

The BTA would like to Thank **The Fletching Singers** for their generous donation of £433.66 to our organisation after their Christmas Concert.

Also, Thanks to **Louise Graham** who is selling a range of handmade 'birth trauma' jewellery and donating 10% of the proceeds of the sales to the BTA.



To view the full range visit:
www.weddingandbaby.co.uk/newmumjewellery.htm

BTA 2009 Conference

The BTA are planning a conference on the 12th of June this year. Clinical Psychologist Kirstie McKenzie McHarg will be a speaker, as well as obstetricians and midwives. If you would like to be on the circulation list for further information, please contact enquiries@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

Email Us For Support

support@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk