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- I. Health visitors, neonatal nurses, mental health nurses and midwives can play a critical role in identifying mothers who are at risk or suffering from mental illness and in helping them to access the right support. They can also play an important role in supporting the emotional well-being of women, their babies and families. It is important that all health professionals are given sufficient time to care for their patients which means having the time to listen and talk, to assess, time to delegate or escalate where necessary and the time to deliver personal and dignified care.
 - II. Around 11% of pregnant women and approximately 13% of early postnatal women are affected by perinatal mental ill health¹. These illnesses range from anxiety and depression, to less well known illnesses such as postpartum psychosis. If untreated, they can have a devastating impact on women and their families. Evidence shows that when mothers suffer from these illnesses it increases the likelihood that children will experience behavioural, social or learning difficulties and fail to fulfil their potential.
 - III. Therefore fast and effective action to tackle perinatal mental illness is critical to give all children the best start in life. Early identification and expert management is crucial in terms of prevention and achieving positive outcomes. The onset and escalation of perinatal mental illnesses can often be prevented through early identification and expert management of a woman's condition, and prompt and informed choices about treatment. Even if the illness itself is not preventable, it is possible to prevent many of the negative effects of perinatal mental illness on families.
 - IV. Suicide remains a leading cause of maternal death² and it is essential that women's mental health is given parity of esteem with physical health throughout pregnancy and after birth.
 - V. According to a report published by the Centre for Mental Health in 2014 on the costs of perinatal mental health problems, 5 out of 7 Local Health Boards (LHBs) in Wales had no specialist perinatal provision available³. The Welsh Government's announcement last year of a £1.5M investment into perinatal mental health services was certainly very welcome, but it is vital that this investment continues and that it is at a sufficient level to meet the shortfall. There was also a commitment from the Welsh Government that Health Boards will ensure that there is an accessible community perinatal service in each part of Wales by November 2016, and the Committee should look carefully at whether this commitment has been met and whether further investment is required.

¹ Howard L.M, Molyneaux E, Dennis C et al (2014) *Non-Psychotic mental disorders in the perinatal period*

² Knight. M, et al (2014) *Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care*

³ Annette Bauer, Michael Parsonage et al (2014) *The costs of perinatal mental health problems*

- VI. An evaluation of Mind Cymru's Two in Mind service, (a project aimed at raising awareness of perinatal mental health problems and increasing the recognition of early signs), found that the project had been both timely and strategic⁴. The project evaluation stated that the sector now is beginning to recognise (through overwhelming research and evidence) the importance of optimising the bond between mother and baby in the first years of life. Participants in the 'Enjoy Your Baby' CBT course available as part of the service showed improvements in mental well-being.
- VII. Since 2013 there has been no specialist mother and baby in-patient unit (Perinatal Mental Health Unit) in Wales. This means that mothers in need of in-patient care for perinatal mental health problems either have to be cared for out of Wales (e.g. in Bristol or Birmingham) if they are not to be separated from their babies, or separated from their babies and admitted to a general psychiatry acute admission facilities in Wales. Neither of these scenarios is desirable, having negative consequences for the mothers, their babies and their families. Much concern has been expressed by patients, their families, special interest groups and frontline clinical staff about this situation. The committee needs to consider carefully whether it is acceptable for Wales not to have its own dedicated in-patient perinatal unit.

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

⁴ Two in Mind Project Evaluation - <http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source>