

Remote hospital working: the impact on maternity care provision

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Introduction

The Maternity and Newborn Safety Investigations programme is part of a national strategy to improve maternity safety across the NHS in England. The accessibility/availability of healthcare varies across the United Kingdom¹, resulting in health inequalities. An MNSI investigation identified the need for a shared understanding, regarding the impact that remote hospital working can have on the care provision of maternity services.

A mother with complex medical problems received maternity care at a remote hospital. The geographical location of the hospital impacted on the ability to provide equitable services to the mother. There was limited understanding and consideration that birthing in a remote hospital brought increased complexity to her maternity care planning. It was not recognised that more specialist obstetric input was needed, and it was safer for the mother to birth at a tertiary hospital. The mother died in the immediate postnatal period following a medical event.

What we found during our investigation

The MNSI investigation identified many factors that are faced by a hospital when it is geographically located in a remote part of the country.

These included:



Less exposure caring for women/birthing people with complex medical conditions



Not being able to provide the same clinical services as tertiary hospitals



Skill mix challenges



Limited practical training opportunities



Recruitment and retention difficulties



Lengthy transfer times

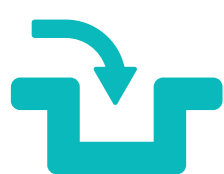


Impact of adverse weather on travel

Conclusions

Remote hospital working brings a unique complexity to maternity care provision, that may not always be fully understood.

What can remote/surrounding hospitals do?



Narrow the gap – encourage collaborative working between remote and surrounding hospitals.



Carefully coordinate/plan and use resources when time critical transfers are needed.



Use policies/guidelines and collaboration to determine:

- When care is safe to be provided by the remote hospital
- When additional care input is needed
- When women/birthing people should birth at a tertiary hospital



To find out more about MNSI and our investigations or to attend a webinar discussing this topic further please scan the QR code



REFERENCES

¹Karpusheff, J. (2023) Who is more likely to lose in the postcode lottery of health? (Online). Available at Who is more likely to lose in the postcode lottery of health? – The Health Foundation (Accessed 15 October 2024).