#15babiesaday initiative joins forces with Refuge

Tuesday 4 July, 2017

On Thursday 15th June Sands (Stillbirth and neonatal death charity) erected washing lines with 15 baby grows hanging from them, in iconic locations around the UK to provoke a discussion as to why 15 babies die before, during or shortly after birth every day in the UK.

Locations for these #15babiesaday displays included the Houses of Parliament, Tower Bridge, Tate Modern, the London Assembly and outside parliament buildings in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

The 750 baby grows which were displayed around the UK are now being donated to anti-domestic violence charity Refuge. This is to highlight the fact that domestic violence can be a cause of miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death.

Almost one fifth (18.2%) of women who arrive at Refuge's services are pregnant or have recently had a baby. This increases to 23% in Refuge accommodation.

On average, one baby dies every 90 minutes in the UK. While the number of deaths has fallen in recent years, this is no time to be complacent. We are moving three times slower than some other European countries to save lives. The rate of mortality also varies hugely from region to region, reflecting a map of poverty and health inequality. This postcode lottery is unacceptable.

Dr Clea Harmer, Chief Executive of Sands (Stillbirth and neonatal death charity), said: "Our #15babiesaday initiative has provided an important opportunity to raise awareness of the fact that 15 babies die before, during and after birth every day in the UK. The full extent of the tragedy of stillbirth and neonatal death is not widely known – leaving families feeling alone, isolated and unsure where to turn for help and support when their baby dies. We want to change this, break the taboo, and increase our understanding of why these deaths occur. The 15 baby grows on a washing line have been the focal point of this initiative and we are delighted to be able to send them to Refuge in the knowledge that they will help mothers and babies who have had to flee domestic violence."

Sandra Horley, CBE, chief executive of Refuge, said: "One third of domestic violence either starts or gets worse when a woman becomes pregnant and more than a fifth of women who access Refuge's services are pregnant. Women who come to our refuges often flee their abusive partners in the middle of the night taking with them nothing more than the clothes they are wearing and have very little money with which to begin a new life. We are very grateful to Sands for the donation of baby grows which we will distribute to women across our services. Thank you so much for this much needed support."

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) supported #15babiesaday. Commenting, RCM's Director of Midwifery, Louise Silverton, said: "The RCM is supporting Sands with their latest campaign #15babiesaday as we believe that it is crucial to work together to reduce antenatal stillbirths and avoidable baby deaths.

"There are initiatives and training already being carried out across the UK to improve the rates of unavoidable baby deaths, but we need to ensure midwives have the time to do a thorough initial assessment of a woman, as well as ongoing risk assessments. This is where continuity of care and carer can play a crucial part and maternity services should also be reaching out to those women who are only engaging with maternity services late into their pregnancy.

"We also must ensure that there are enough bereavement midwives in place to ensure that parents and families get the support they need. Our hope is that all bereaved parents receive the same level of care and support regardless of where they live in the UK."

For further information on #15babiesaday visit: www.sands.org.uk/get-involved/sands-awareness-month

Ends

Notes to editors

For further information, please contact Lee Armitt, Press and PR Officer in the Sands press office on 020

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Sands. Refuge :: Baby Grow :: Domestic :: Violence :: Babies :: Stillbirth :: Neonatal ::

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About Sands

Sands is the leading stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK. They work nationally to reduce baby deaths through promoting better maternity care and funding research. They have a programme of training and a wide range of resources designed to support professionals to improve the bereavement care they provide following the death of a baby, and they provide a comprehensive bereavement support service both nationally through their helpline and locally through around 100 regional support groups based across the UK. Further information can be found at www.sands.org.uk

About Refuge

Refuge opened the world's first safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence in West London, in 1971. For the first time, someone was saying it was wrong to beat your partner. Back then, domestic violence was seen as a "private matter", to be dealt with "behind closed doors". Society turned a blind eye. Since 1971, Refuge has led the campaign against domestic violence. We have grown to become the country's largest single provider of specialist domestic violence services. On any given day we support more than 4,600 women, children and men*. (*As at January 2017)

Prevalence of domestic violence

- One third of women who experience domestic violence are hit for the first time whilst pregnant *(Duxbury, F. (2014) 'Domestic violence and abuse' in ABC of Domestic and Sexual Violence. S. Bewley and J. Welch. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons Ltd: p9-16.)*
- Estimated that four to nine in every 100 pregnant women are abused during their pregnancy or soon after the birth (*Taft, A. (2002) 'Violence against women in pregnancy and after childbirth: Current knowledge and issues in healthcare responses', Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Issues, Paper 6)*

Impacts:

- This study (https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/downloads/files/mbrrace-uk/reports/MBRRACE-UK Maternal Report 2015.pdf) shows that, of all women who died between 2009 and 2013 during or up to six weeks after pregnancy:

- Domestic violence during pregnancy doubles the risk of preterm birth and low birth weight

The fact in 2017

1. 15 babies die every day in the UK either before, during or shortly after birth[i].
2. Every day 4 babies die around their due date[ii]. Many of these lives could be saved with improvements both to care and to our understanding of why babies die and how to protect them.
3. Every year around 900 babies die or have a severe brain injury as a result of something that goes wrong during labour and birth around their due date[iii]. The majority of these tragedies could be avoided.
4. While the number of deaths has fallen in recent years, this is no time to be complacent. We are moving 3 times slower[iv] than some other European countries to save lives.
5. Research shows that when a baby dies before it is born and close to its due date, in six out of ten cases that death might have been prevented with different care[v]. In 2015 alone, 600 opportunities to save a life were missed OR Since 2015 when the government announced its ambition to halve baby deaths, 1200 opportunities to save a life have been missed.
6. Families are too often sent home with poor explanations about their baby's death. If hospitals don't adequately investigate what happened, how can lessons be learned? Yet research shows that there is no local review of care for three-quarters of stillbirths at the end of pregnancy[vi], and even where reviews had been carried out few follow national guidance or involve parents.

How can hospitals fulfil their legal Duty of Candour[vii] to be honest and clear about care that should have

been better if they have not examined what happened?

1. The safety and quality of maternity care across the UK continues to be a postcode lottery. The rate of mortality varies hugely from region to region[viii], reflecting a map of poverty and health inequality.
2. One in 150 births ends in the death of a baby. With better information, women can be empowered to help minimise the risks and make the right choices for them about their pregnancy.
3. One in 5 stillbirths is associated with smoking[ix]. In some parts of the UK up to one in four women smoke during pregnancy, yet some health care providers can't afford support services for women to help them stop. The slashing of Public Health budgets is having fatal consequences.
4. How can the governments fulfil its plans for better and safer maternity care without the capacity to deliver it? Ever-increasing pressure on the maternity workforce is threatening safety: England alone needs 3,500 more midwives[x].

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[i] MBRRACE-UK surveillance report on 2015 data

[ii] MBRRACE-UK surveillance report on 2015 data

[iii] RCOG Each Baby Counts, Key messages from 2015 report

[iv] Lancet Stillbirth Series 2016

[v] MBRRACE-UK Confidential Enquiry into Normally-formed Antepartum Term Stillbirths, 2015

[vi] MBRRACE-UK Confidential Enquiry into Normally-formed Antepartum Term Stillbirths, 2015

[vii] http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/regulation-20-duty-candour

[viii] MBRRACE-UK surveillance report on 2015 data

[ix] MBRRACE-UK surveillance report on 2015 data

[x]

Find out more about how you can support Sands in 2017 by clicking here

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