Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week 2019

Tuesday 5 March, 2019

The Sick Children's Trust is joining leading children's charities to raise awareness of all those affected by premature or traumatic births. They're backing the campaign that will highlight the need for appropriate and timely support to reduce the immediate and long-term impact on mental health and emotional well-being for families and the people who work with them.

Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week takes place 15-21 April. During this time, families and people from all over the country, will share their experience and memories of life on neonatal intensive care units across the country. The week has been established by new charity, Leo's, set up by Lottie King, in memory of her late son.

Organisations involved in Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week will provide support to anyone affected by mental health illnesses, pregnancy loss and the death of a baby. Together, with health professionals and services, they are committed to raise more awareness of mental health and the neonatal journey and unite for better care across the country.

One of these organisations is The Sick Children's Trust, a national charity that supports families in free 'Home from Home' accommodation when they have a seriously ill child in the country's leading paediatric hospitals. A number of the families supported by the charity have critically ill babies that require specialist care miles away from home. By giving them free 'Home from Home' accommodation just minutes from their baby the charity enables families to spend as much time as possible with their loved one, whilst, at the same time, offering practical and emotional support and easing financial burdens. One such family is Lottie King's.

Lottie King, 30, founder of Leo's who have organised Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week, was terrified when she went into labour just 24 weeks into her pregnancy and Leo arrived on 19 January 2015. He was rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at University Hospital of North Tees, but was too sick to survive. With Lottie unable to leave her hospital bed for fear she would deliver the second baby, she made the heart-breaking decision to turn off Leo's life support machine and said goodbye to her son. Leo's brother, Oska, arrived four days later and, although he too was seriously ill, the doctors were able to successfully intubate the baby and transferred him to NICU, where he spent the next four months of his life growing stronger.

It wasn't until the following winter that Oska's health began to deteriorate and Lottie took him into hospital with breathing difficulties. Once there, Oska's condition worsened rapidly and he required an emergency transfer to a specialist paediatric hospital, Royal Victoria Infirmary, in Newcastle upon Tyne. On arrival, and with Oska being treated on the paediatric intensive care unit (PICU), Lottie was told about Crawford House run by The Sick Children's Trust and offered a room, totally free of charge.

Mum, Lottie, who has created the charity in memory of her son Leo to help more families who face the neonatal journey, says:

"I moved into Crawford House straight away. The hope was Oska would improve fairly quickly and we wouldn't need to stay for very long.

"Sadly, things didn't go to plan and, in the early hours of 23 December, the phone in my bedroom at Crawford House rang. Oska had gone into cardiac arrest. Thankfully I was so close to the hospital that I was able to sprint across the car park and be by his side in minutes. It was terrifying, all the more so as memories of losing Leo came flooding back."

Over the weeks that followed Oska, now four years old, recovered and was discharged home. Since then, however, he has had several further PICU admissions.

Lottie, continues:

"My traumatic experiences in hospital both before and after giving birth have led me to set up a new charity, called Leo's, in my son's memory. The charity's mission is to support and care for all those affected by premature or traumatic birth and raise awareness of babies needing NICU stays and the effects this can have on mental health. We are grateful that The Sick Children's Trust is supporting Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week, and hope that it isn't long before the impact of the campaign is felt nationwide.

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“The Sick Children’s Trust has supported my family through some tough times. Knowing I had some respite from PICU when I needed it made a huge difference to my mental health. The house staff always asked us how Oska was doing and were genuinely interested in his progress. It really felt like they cared about how we were all coping and nothing ever seemed like too much trouble.”

Crawford House Manager, Andrew Leadbitter, says:

“It was such a relief for Lottie and her family when they have been able to stay at Crawford House. Like Leo’s, because of our proximity to and interaction with the hospital wards, we also know it’s not only families that are affected. The work of Leo’s will have an impact on the teams that care for babies, including doctors, nurses, midwives, obstetricians, and allied health professionals.

“Leo’s charity motto is ‘We’ve Got You’ which is not dissimilar to The Sick Children’s Trust’s charity motto, ‘We’re here, so you can be there’. This is why we are speaking out in support of Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week and will do all we can to back the campaign.”

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/

For further information about Leo’s, please visit https://www.leosneonatal.org/

For further information about Neonatal Mental Health Awareness Week, please visit https://www.leosneonatal.org/neonatal-mental-health-awareness-week/

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About The Sick Children’s Trust

The Sick Children’s Trust is working to a future where every family with a seriously ill child in hospital will be able to stay together, just minutes from their child’s bed during their treatment.

We believe keeping families together significantly improves the recovery of seriously ill children. We provide free, high-quality ‘Home from Home’ accommodation, as well as emotional and practical support, to families with sick children in hospital in the UK.

The Sick Children’s Trust was founded in 1982 by two paediatric specialists Dr Jon Pritchard and Professor James Malpas. Today we have ten ‘Homes from Home’ at major hospitals around the country where families can stay free of charge.

We support 4,000 families every year, and there is a growing demand for our ‘Homes from Home’ as children must increasingly travel long distances to get the specialist treatment they need. www.sickchildrenstrust.org

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