New bereavement suite opened at Northwick Park Hospital

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Parents in London, who have been given the devastating news that their baby has died, will now have a peaceful and private place to spend precious extra time with their baby.

A new bereavement suite was opened at Northwick Park Hospital (Part of London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) in Watford Road, Harrow, North West London, today.

The Myrtle Suite has been funded by the hospital and also received significant additional funding from Sands (stillbirth and neonatal death charity). It was officially opened by Sands' ambassador, Rakhee Thakrar.

Rakhee is most famous for playing Shabnam Masood, the EastEnders character who suffered a stillbirth during an episode of the BBC One soap in 2015.

Rakhee Thakrar said: "I knew I wanted to be involved with Sands from my very first research meeting, where I heard in great detail how devastating and utterly heart-breaking it is when a baby dies.

"I've been working with the fantastic team at Sands for a while now and I am honoured to open the Myrtle Suite today, which will provide a quiet place for parents and families to grieve, receive comfort and make special memories with their babies."

The funds to furnish the suite have been donated by West London Sands, a local Sands group run by bereaved parents which offers support to other parents through regular meetings and also an individual befriending service.

Bereaved families of West London Sands group have raised money in memory of their babies through events such as marathons, cake sales, pub quizzes and golf days to provide vital funds and enable the group to work closely with many local hospitals to improve facilities for bereaved parents.

Local parents Jess and Rahul attended the official opening of the Myrtle Suite. Their son sadly died at the hospital, and Rahul has since taken part in two marathons, one in Paris and one in Berlin, raising over £2,000.

The work on the bereavement suite began in March this year and was led by Marva Wilson, Bereavement Midwife. She worked closely with two Sands volunteers, with involvement from midwives working in the delivery suite. She said: "I would like to thank the maternity management for their support throughout the project and to West London Sands for their help in realising my vision."

Located at the far end of the maternity ward, to limit the contact with other patients, the room has been decorated in neutral tones to keep it light and offer a tranquil, private place for parents to grieve in comfort with their immediate family. There is a sofa an en-suite bathroom, kitchen area with tea and coffee-making facilities and a television.

Lynn Lacey, Chair of West London Sands, said: "I am delighted that after months of hard work the new bereavement suite at Northwick Park Hospital is now open. The Myrtle Suite has been very carefully planned by two of our West London Sands volunteers, Paula Sagnier and Karen Jones, along with Marva and the midwifery team at the hospital. I hope this Suite will help staff to provide the high level of care and support that bereaved parents need."

Dr Clea Harmer, Chief Executive at Sands, said: "It is wonderful that the new Myrtle Bereavement Suite at Northwick Park has been opened. It will provide parents with a safe and private place to spend time with their baby at a devastating time in their lives.

"I'd like to say an enormous thank you to everyone at West London Sands for their hard work in raising substantial funds which have helped to make the suite a reality."

Dame Jacqueline Docherty, Chief Executive of London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust said: "We are very grateful to Sands for the support they have given us and we're delighted to open this new bereavement facility. We hope the Myrtle Suite will provide some comfort for parents at a very difficult time, so that they can grieve in private with their family."

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Danny O'Leary, Professional Lead for Midwifery, at Northwick Park Hospital, said: "I am delighted that we now have a dedicated bereavement suite for parents who experience such a traumatic loss of their baby. I would like to thank Marva and all our midwives involved for their leadership and support throughout the project and a special note of thanks to West London Sands for their wonderful support and help also."

There are over 100 Sands support groups across the UK which meet on a regular monthly basis, providing help and support to bereaved parents and families.

Any bereaved parents and families, whether their loss is recent or was long ago, are welcome to come to West London Sands meetings. To find out more, please call on 07710 010026 or wlschairs@gmail.com or visit the WLS website: www.westlondonsands.org

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Notes to editors

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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

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