AIMS For a better birth...

Who's Who in Pregnancy and Birth?

You are likely to meet many different people when you are pregnant, giving birth and afterwards. Some specialise in maternity and others work in other areas of the NHS and some work outside the NHS. This is not a complete list and you may be referred to a specialist if you have a health condition.

Midwives

A midwife is a trained health professional who supports you during pregnancy, birth, and in the first weeks after birth. If your pregnancy and labour are straightforward then a midwife can provide all the care you need, so you may not see a doctor.

If they think you need more specialist care your midwife can refer you to a specialist midwife (e.g. a diabetes midwife) or doctor. It is up to you to decide whether you want to see these people.

Midwives can also help you with feeding your baby, including supporting breastfeeding. However, if you are having problems with breastfeeding a trained Infant Feeding Specialist may be better able to help (see below).

A midwife will usually visit you at home at least once or twice after the birth to check how you and your baby are, and should be available for you to call if you are worried about anything. After a short time (usually ten days) she will hand over your care to a Health Visitor.

Consultant Midwives are more senior. They can be helpful in getting support for the type of birth you want.

Obstetricians

An obstetrician is a doctor with specialist training in providing medical care for pregnancy and birth. Your midwife may suggest you see an obstetrician if you have a pregnancy-related health condition (e.g. high blood pressure), or if there are concerns about your or your baby's health during pregnancy or labour.

Obstetricians can carry out caesarean births and assisted births where instruments (forceps or ventouse) are used to help you birth your baby.

Sonographers

Obstetric sonographers perform ultrasound scans. You will be offered scans to check how far along you

are in your pregnancy, to look for physical issues with your pregnancy and baby, and to see how your baby is growing.

General Practitioner (GP)

A GP is a doctor who provides general medical care and is based at your local surgery. They are not usually involved in maternity care. While you are pregnant your GP can help with any medical problems that are not pregnancy related. If your baby is born at home, they may carry out the health check that is offered to all newborn babies. They will also offer to check on you and your baby's health 6-8 weeks after the birth.

Obstetric Anaesthetists

You will see an Obstetric Anaesthetist if you are having pain relief such as an epidural in labour.

If your baby is to be born by caesarean they will carry out the epidural, spinal or general anaesthetic for the birth.

You might be advised to see anaesthetist before birth or during labour if you have a health condition that could change during labour or soon after birth. Anaesthetists might also ask to meet with you during your pregnancy if anaesthetics or epidurals might be more complicated, perhaps if you have had operations on your back or have a high BMI (weight).

Neonatologists (Neonatal Paediatricians)

These are doctors who specialise in the care of newborn babies who are unwell or are born early. If your baby needs to spend time in a Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) it will be the neonatologists that are in charge of their care.

Neonatal Nurses

These are nurses with specialist training who look after babies that are born early or unwell and provide support for the parents. Most neonatal nurses work in SCBU or NICU.

Obstetric Physiotherapists

Obstetric physiotherapists specialise in the physical changes that pregnancy and childbirth can bring to your body. You may see one during pregnancy if you are suffering pain in your pelvis (Pelvic girdle pain, PGP) or trouble holding your urine (wee). They can also suggest exercises to help you recover after birth. You may want to see one if you are having physical problems after your baby is born.

Maternity Support Workers (MSW)

MSWs do not have a midwifery qualification but support midwives to offer care to those who are pregnant and their families. They work in hospitals and in the community supervised by a midwife. Some have specialist training and experience in areas like baby feeding, mental health and diabetes and might be the first person you see if you need help with any of those.

Dietitians

A dietitian can discuss how what you eat might be changed to help you with problems like severe vomiting, low iron levels, gaining too little or too much weight, controlling diabetes, etc. You may also get support from them if you have a limited diet for any reason.

Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals support women and their families experiencing mental health challenges. Depending on your needs and where you live you might be offered an appointment with a specially trained midwife or health visitor, or a professional from the perinatal mental health service who works with members of the maternity services team.

Interpreters and Translators

It is your right to have a professional interpreter provided if you need one. The NHS has a legal responsibility to make sure that its services are accessible to everyone. Doctors and midwives know that a professional interpreter should be offered to help you understand and take part in discussions, if you need one. For more information, see the NHS guidance: www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/guidance-for-commissioners-interpreting-and-translation-services-in-primary-care.pdf

Health Visitor (HV)

In the first few days after the birth it will be your community midwife who checks that you and your baby are well. After a short time (usually ten days) she will hand over your care to a Health Visitor.

Health Visitors are registered nurses or midwives who offer child health and development support to parents until the child is 5 years old. Sometimes HVs offer a home visit before your baby is born to introduce themselves and to talk through any questions that you might have about caring for your new baby.

After your baby is born you can visit a clinic run by the HVs if you want to get your baby weighed. You can

also talk to them if you have any worries about your baby. You should be given information about when and where the clinics are held, and whether you need to book.

Infant Feeding Specialists

Infant feeding specialists include Breastfeeding Counsellors (BFC) and International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC). They are trained to support parents to decide how to feed their babies and can help you with breastfeeding, formula feeding, and mixed feeding. Some work as volunteers or as private practitioners, others are employed by the NHS.

You might also see a Breastfeeding Peer Supporter. These are usually mothers who have breastfed their own babies and have had some training in helpling with common breastfeeding issues.

Other Birth Workers:

Doulas

Doulas usually offer pregnancy and birth support, or sometimes support for families in the early weeks with a newborn. Most will have some training but not be medically qualified. They can help you prepare for and plan your birth, give you information and support you in discussions with midwives and doctors. Many offer practical, physical and emotional support during labour and the birth of your baby. They are not qualified to give you medical advice nor replace the care of your midwife. For more information, see the Doula UK website: www.doula.org.uk

Antenatal teacher

Antenatal teachers help parents to prepare for birth and life with a new baby, usually as part of a group.

Hypnobirthing teachers offer a kind of birth preparation that includes ways of helping you to relax and simple self-hypnosis skills to use during labour.

The amount of training teachers have had varies. Antenatal courses also vary a lot in length and the range of topics they cover. You will need to pay for most courses, but some organisations and hospitals offer free antenatal classes.