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Book Review: Mothership by Francesca Segal

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Reviewed for AIMS by Jo Dagustun

Mothership

By Francesca Segal

Chatto and Windus, 2019

288 pages



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According to Bliss (a charity supporting parents of babies who are born prematurely or unwell), one in seven of all babies born in the UK spend some time in neonatal care. Whether the stay is short or long, it is an experience that has a lasting impact on every family involved, and it is good to see a new book on the market that allows outsiders a glimpse into this rather hidden but hugely valued part of the NHS.

As an established novelist, Francesca Segal is clearly at an advantage in writing about her time as a new mother whose twins are being cared for in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). In this memoir, Francesca describes the first 56 days of her daughters' lives, until they are ready to go home together as a family.

For readers (like me) who have not encountered life as a NICU mother, Francesca's account offers a compelling insight into the experience. It shares some of the unspoken rules of this unique space and invites us to consider the value of spontaneous peer support, as complementary to the professional support offered. Against the backdrop of a hugely impressive service offer, it allows the reader the opportunity to consider some key areas for service improvement. And, whilst Francesca's account is firmly centred on her experience as a milk-producing NICU mother, the memoir also includes some thought-provoking observations about the role of fathers, too.

The memoir doesn't attempt to tell you 'everything you need to know about NICU'. It is a story of one woman's experience: just one of many diverse experiences. But it is no less important for that: this

memoir provides a key introduction to many aspects of the parental and baby NICU experience from a parent's perspective.

This book would make an excellent read for anyone planning to work with families accessing neonatal care. I'd also recommend it to anyone involved in maternity/neonatal-service improvement, including Maternity Voices Partnership members, both with and without personal experience of having a baby in NICU.