The best specialist neonatal care service

The NICE quality standard on specialist neonatal care sets out how a high-quality specialist neonatal care service should be organised so that the best care can be offered to patients. Specialist neonatal care is the care provided for newborn babies in neonatal units who need extra care, for example those born prematurely or who are ill and need treatment in hospital.

The quality standard on neonatal care is made up of nine statements. These statements are about the care you and your baby should receive and are summarised below.

1. Procedures for the transfer of pregnant women and newborn babies into specialist neonatal care should follow local newborn baby guidelines for the network (the local group of hospitals providing neonatal services) that are integrated with other maternity and newborn network guidelines.

2. A yearly check should be carried out to ensure that each local network has enough staff, cots and equipment for the needs of the area.

3. Neonatal services should have enough skilled and competent staff.

4. Transfer of babies into, and out of, specialist neonatal care should be safe and efficient.

5. Parents or carers of babies in specialist neonatal care should be encouraged and supported to help them plan for and care for their
baby. Regular communication between medical staff and parents or carers is needed.

6. Mothers of babies in specialist neonatal care should be offered support to start and continue breastfeeding, and to express milk.

7. Health and social care plans for babies in specialist neonatal care should be coordinated to help ensure that babies go from hospital care to care at home safely and effectively.

8. Neonatal services should keep accurate and complete records, and should take part in national clinical audits (to review performance) and applicable research studies.

9. Babies who receive specialist neonatal care should be monitored after they leave hospital and changes to their health recorded over time.

**Your baby’s care**

In the NHS, patients and healthcare professionals have rights and responsibilities as set out in the NHS Constitution ([www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NHSConstitution](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NHSConstitution)). All NICE guidance is written to reflect these. You have the right to be involved in discussions and make informed decisions about your baby’s treatment and care with their healthcare team. Your choices are important and healthcare professionals should support these wherever possible. You and your baby should be treated with dignity and respect.

To help you make decisions, healthcare professionals should explain your baby’s condition and any options for treatment, including possible benefits and risks. You should be given relevant information that is suitable for you and that reflects any religious, ethnic or cultural needs you have. It should also take into account whether you have any physical or learning disability, sight or hearing problem or language difficulties. You should have access to an interpreter or advocate (someone who helps you put your views across) if needed.
You should be able to discuss or review your baby's care as the treatment progresses, or circumstances change. This may include changing your mind about your baby's treatment or care.

All treatment and care should be given with your informed consent. Healthcare professionals should follow the Department of Health’s advice on consent (www.dh.gov.uk/consent) and the code of practice for the Mental Capacity Act. Information about the Act and consent issues is available from www.publicguardian.gov.uk. In Wales healthcare professionals should follow advice on consent from the Welsh Assembly Government (www.wales.nhs.uk/consent).

In an emergency, if the person with parental responsibility for the baby cannot be contacted, healthcare professionals may give treatment immediately when it is in the baby’s best interests.

**Further information**
The full quality standard on specialist neonatal care is available from www.nice.org.uk