

23 March 2012

The baby who can be born again and again

Maternity staff are looking after a new arrival at Worthing Hospital, a baby who can be born over and over again.

The new birthing simulator teaching aid, which has only just come on to the market, is designed to help maternity staff to hone their skills, both in terms of making them more prepared for difficult deliveries and just as importantly to help them practice their communication skills with women who are in labour.

Childbirth is usually a joyful time but it can also be extremely stressful, and so it is absolutely critical that maternity staff can communicate confidently, clearly and sympathetically with women who may be upset, nervous or in pain.

The hospital's new arrival – called 'Natalie' – is placed within a fake pregnancy 'bump' which is simply strapped on to the stomach. The baby dummy is filled with air or water and can be positioned to reproduce a normal or a breech birth, and the pack can simulate a woman's waters breaking, or heavy bleeding. The baby can be given a pulse, and so staff can also practice resuscitating a newborn.

The teaching aid will initially be used in the high-tech Worthing Hospital simulation suite, alongside the fully-grown dummy patient there, but because it is completely mobile staff will be able to practice their skills anywhere – even outside in the car park – in an effort to mock-up real-life situations. Training sessions can be filmed, and then teams can watch themselves at work to discuss how they performed.

Worthing Hospital is managed by Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust, which also runs St Richard's Hospital in Chichester and Southlands Hospital in Shoreham.

Ruth Mason, Labour Ward Consultant at Worthing Hospital, believes the new addition to the maternity team will be invaluable.

“The more we can make our training resemble real life, the better it will be,” said Dr Mason. “This ‘baby’ will really improve the preparation we are able to give staff, which in turn will benefit our expectant mothers.

“Our new arrival will allow us to practice coping with difficult births, but I think the real value will be that we can give staff more support to help them communicate more effectively. Women during labour can be in pain, can be angry, frightened and sometimes aggressive – at such times communication skills are absolutely vital.

“We will be asking our pretend mums-to-be to be as loud and as difficult as they can!”

It is not only expectant mums in West Sussex who will benefit from the new training aid. For each one of the £450 birthing simulators sold, the manufacturer Laerdal donates one to parts of the developing world where childbirth is a far riskier process.

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