

Caring for a pregnant client with a learning disability

Ref:

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Maternity Antenatal Forum

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Guidelines Definition

Clinical guidelines are systemically developed statements that assist clinicians and patients in making decisions about appropriate treatments for specific conditions.

They allow deviation from a prescribed pathway according to the individual circumstances and where reasons can be clearly demonstrated and documented.

Minor Amendments

If a minor change is required to the document, which does not require a full review please identify the change below and update the version number.

Type of change	Why change made	Page number	Date of change	Version 1 to 1.1	Name of responsible person

CONTENTS

Guidelines Definition	i
Minor Amendments	i
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined. 1
Key	
Points.....	2
Appendix - Learning Disabilities Assessment Tool.....	3-4
References.....	5

Statement of guideline

This guideline is to ensure that Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB) provides clear written guidelines with regard to planning the appropriate care for a client with learning disability .Working with the multiagency team to provide Safeguards for mother, baby and family. This policy is aimed at all professionals working within Maternity and sets out responsibilities of Midwives and professionals involved in the planning of the clients care.

Introduction

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities for example household tasks, socialising or managing money, which affects someone for their whole life (Mencap 2020).The level of support someone needs depends on the individual .

The numbers of women with severe learning disabilities who will become mothers is low however, as more people with mild to moderate learning disabilities are supported to lead more independent lives in the community it is expected that more will become parents.

It is often only when individuals come into contact with services, such as during pregnancy, that an inability to fully engage with health advice and systems of care becomes apparent. This may alert practitioners to consider the potential capacity of the prospective parents to have the ability to care for their unborn child. However, for women with a learning disability there may be elements of denial or confusion which may lead to a delay in understanding or acknowledging that they are pregnant. Capacity and understanding needs to be considered and is time and decision specific. The client may have capacity for some things but not others and may also be scared at what is going to happen which could again affect capacity. The capacity assessment may need to be repeated. This policy and assessment of need tool aims to give guidance to maternity staff and ensure principles of good practice

Pregnant women with a learning disability may require lots of support from the multiagency team or a care package offering minimal support The mum to be should be assessed on an individual basis as every client and their family will have different dynamics and need .Midwives caring for a mum to be with a learning disability should assess need throughout the pregnancy to limit undue emotional and psychological distress for the client and also their family. Care to be needs led support.

When a learning disability has been identified at the booking interview the midwife will take a full history, reflecting the client's needs and family support. Offering material to aid understanding if the client has difficulty with reading and writing such as visual aids, flip charts, diagrams etc. (Antenatal Screening Wales have [accessible information](#) available online)

Key Points

- Use everyday words .Keep sentences short.
- Liaison with the Community Learning Difficulties Team and referral for support if it is required.
- Referral to Adult Services if appropriate to offer additional support for the client and their family
- Use of the Advocacy service to facilitate understanding and decision making
- Assess any anxieties the client has to minimize any undue distress (ideally a continuity of care with a small team of midwives).Think about the environment – can we go somewhere quieter?
- If additional support is required, to work with the multi- agency team to safeguard the unborn and the client throughout the antenatal, birth and post-natal period.
- A parenting assessment by Children Services may be required to aid the Safeguarding Process performed in a reasonable timeframe prior to birth of baby.
- Assessments of understanding may need to be assessed by an appropriate practitioner in view of pregnancy, health needs and parenting capacity.
- Ensure plans of care are in place to facilitate individualised care and that the client and their family understand them.
- Client and family to meet the health visitor prior to birth of baby to enhance relationships between practitioner and family.
- Preparation for labour and birth, birth plan with discussions with Obstetric and Anaesthetic team if necessary.
- Plans in place during post-natal stay to minimize anxiety and distress e.g. carers to stay with client.
- Liaison for discharge to community with community midwifery team and health visitor.Pre discharge planning meeting if required with involvement of the multi-agency team.

Appendix – Learning Disabilities Assessment Tool

Consider :-	Yes	No	How can you meet this need :-
Communication			
Is the woman able to communicate effectively?			
Can the woman read and or write?			
Does the woman understand information provided to her about her pregnancy? Birth? Care of baby?			
Mental Capacity			
Are there any concerns regarding mental capacity to make the decisions needed?			
Behaviour			
Does the woman display any behaviour that may challenge or cause risk/harm?			
Psychological/Emotional			
Does the woman have any fears or anxieties e.g. medical interventions venepuncture?			
Personal Needs			
Are there any issues with mobility/personal hygiene/continence?			
Epilepsy			
Does the woman have epilepsy?			
Eating/Drinking/Swallowing			
Can the woman take medication independently any problems taking medication?			
Sleep Pattern			
Are there any problems sleeping?			
Preparation for birth			
Has there been discussions about labour and birth?			
Are there any issues regarding coping in labour and pain relief?			
Consider:-	Yes	No	Comments :-
Does the woman know who to call if she is worried about any pregnancy issue?			
Labour			

Does the woman know signs of labour and what to do when it happens?			
Parenting Skills			
Are there preparations for the baby?			
Recognising babies needs Feeding etc.?			
Supportive partner/family			
Is there someone supporting her through the pregnancy, birth and post natally ?			
Safeguarding Concerns			
Are there any concerns, is there involvement with Children Services? C1 referral .Pre Birth plan in place			
Liaison			
Children Services			
Education			
Learning Disability Team			
Epilepsy Nurse			
Support Worker			
Adult Services			
Summary of Needs and Plan of Care			
Assessment of need Referral to Children Services? Referral to Adult Services? Referral to Advocacy? Liaison with Multiagency Team			

Name
Signature
Date

References

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