

To whom it may concern,

The British Association of Perinatal Medicine strongly supports the unrestricted presence of parents, together whenever possible, with their baby / babies whilst receiving care on a neonatal unit.

Parents are an integral part of providing a baby's care whilst they are being cared for in a neonatal unit. Mothers need to be present to feed their infants and provide care, and physical presence hugely facilitates expressing breast milk / Fathers or partners also need to be able to provide direct care and help to support expressing of milk. Additionally, both parents can provide skin to skin care which has proven benefits in improving physiological stability for the baby and parental wellbeing. It is essential that both parents are part of the frequent communication and decision making about their baby which occurs, especially for the most unwell babies. Parental presence is critical for their own mental wellbeing but also importantly for the wellbeing of their infant as we know that outcomes of premature infants are improved when parents are an integral part of their care. Parents are not visitors.

The experience of having a newborn baby who is unwell for any reason can be an extremely stressful experience and many parents suffer mental health difficulties as a result. This stress is exacerbated if parents are unable to be present with their baby as often as they wish.

We recognise that many Trusts and neonatal units have felt it necessary to reduce visiting in the current pandemic. This reflects a perceived need to protect staff as well as babies and families in our care although we now know that the risk of a baby becoming unwell with COVID is extremely small. We acknowledge that besides reducing infection risk, there are some advantages to fewer visitors, including potentially more time for staff to spend caring for the mother and her partner but it must be very clear that parents are not visitors.

BAPM strongly supports the use of technology such as video calling devices to enhance the experience of parents and allow them to be virtually present at times when they may be unable to be physically present – for example whilst caring for other children or if self-isolating.

[National guidance](#) from RCPCH and BAPM clearly states that (unless infected with SARS-CoV-2 or self-isolating) parents should be allowed full access to their baby and never excluded from the neonatal unit.

BAPM fully supports the campaign by BLISS, the charity for babies born premature or sick, and asks that your Trust review its policy with regard to the neonatal unit in order to facilitate parental access. Parents of sick babies should not be regarded as 'visitors'.

Yours Faithfully

**Dr. Helen Mactier**

President of the British Association of Perinatal Medicine

**Dr Stephen Wardle**

Honorary Secretary of the British Association of Perinatal Medicine

**Dr Wendy Tyler**

Honorary Treasurer of the British Association of Perinatal Medicine