

20 April 2009

The Hon. John Della Bosca BA MLC
Minister for Health
Governor Macquarie Tower
Level 30 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Subject: Perinatal and Postnatal Inpatient Services

MHCC wish to add its voice to concerns raised by Professor Boyce, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, regarding the ban on babies accompanying their mothers in psychiatric wards.

Whilst we fully appreciate the risk/ safety factors appertaining to a baby's presence in psychiatric facilities, we propose that in the absence of specialist units that provision is made to safely enable mothers and babies to be accommodated.

It is crucial that safety protocols in specialist postnatal and early childhood inpatient facilities are provided in public hospitals. Without such services available evidence has shown that mothers and their children will be negatively impacted in terms of long term outcomes. The burden of cost to health services is likely to far exceed the cost of providing inpatient facilities to a small number of women who experience psychotic depression (one in 500) or have acute schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Negative impacts of mother/baby separation can last a lifetime, and indeed present as generational dysfunction.

There is considerable evidence from studies going back over fifty years to the 'Attachment Theory' work of John Bowlby (*A Secure Base: Clinical application of Attachment Theory*.1969, 1988) who described attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings". The earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact continuing throughout life. Early trauma experienced by mother and baby as a result of separation can lead to an inability of a child to form an enduring affectional bond with their caregivers that enables them to use this attachment as a secure base across time and distance. Similarly, a mother may experience difficulty bonding with her child when finally re-united. For a child, the inner representation of this parent-child bond becomes an important part of personality. It serves as an internal working model, or set of expectations about the availability of attachment figures, the likelihood of receiving support from them during times of stress, and the interaction with those figures. This image becomes the basis for all future close relationships during infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adult life (In J.E.B. Myers, L. Berliner, J. Briere, C.T. Hendrix, T. Reid, & C. Jenny (Eds. 2002. *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment, 2nd Edition*).



*Working For
Mental Health*

Mental Health
Co-ordinating Council

PO Box 668
Rozelle, NSW 2039

Phone: (02) 9555 8388
Fax: (02) 9810 8145
Email: info@mhcc.org.au
Website: www.mhcc.org.au

We understand that NSW Health is investigating an inpatient model of care for mothers who require inpatient psychiatric services nevertheless in the meantime no specialist unit exists in NSW other than one 8 bed unit at St, John of God, Burwood, a private facility.

We propose that the seriousness of this matter not be under-rated and that the voices of professionals be heard so that no further patients be subjected to this inhumane and harmful policy directive.

For further information regarding this letter please contact Corinne Henderson, Senior Policy Officer at corinne@mhcc.org.au or Tel: (02) 9555 8388 ext 101.

We look forward to your response on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jenna Bateman', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jenna Bateman
Chief Executive Officer