



Bliss Chief Executive Andy Cole (right) presenting Dr Ian Laing with the Outstanding Neonatal Team of the Year award.

And the award goes to...

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary's neonatal unit won an award at the Mother & Baby magazine Big Heart Awards ceremony. The Big Heart Awards honour those who have either endured or who have helped families deal with extreme difficulties in pregnancy, birth or parenthood. The awards support the work of Bliss, the charity for babies born too soon, too small or too sick. From the many entries, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary's neonatal unit was selected as the winner of the 'Outstanding Neonatal Team of the Year' category, sponsored by the biopharmaceutical company AbbVie.

Meanwhile, at the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) Annual Awards, University of Nottingham midwifery lecturer Dr Jayne Marshall scooped the Johnson's Baby Award for Excellence in Midwifery Education for her innovative work developing midwifery practice



Jayne Marshall receives her award from James Watson of Johnson's Baby, accompanied by the RCM's Chief Executive Cathy Warwick and broadcaster and journalist Natasha Kaplinsky.

through a work-based education programme. Other winners included Lorraine Bowen at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (Pampers Award for Excellence in Postnatal and Neonatal

Care) and Sharon Hurst of Darent Valley Hospital (National Maternity Support Foundation Award Supporting Training and Rewarding Excellence in Bereavement Care).

Reducing the risk of stillbirth in older mothers

Induction of labour at an earlier stage of gestation (39-40 weeks) in older mothers (40+ years) may reduce the risk of stillbirth and neonatal complications. A Scientific Impact Paper from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists looked at a collection of studies exploring the rising age of mothers. The average maternal age in the UK has risen dramatically over the past two decades and studies have shown a link between advanced maternal age and increased risk of stillbirth and neonatal death.

The risk of stillbirth at 39-40 weeks gestation is doubled for women aged 40 years or over. Dr Mandish Dhanjal, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and co-author of the paper, says: "While

the mechanism for an excess risk of stillbirth in women of advanced maternal age is still fairly unknown, the findings collaborated in this paper provide a strong argument for an early induction of labour."

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, welcomes the findings. Charlotte Bevan, Sands Advisor, says: "Sands has argued hard that every year hundreds of stillbirths are potentially avoidable with better, more targeted care. That is exactly what this paper shows: that the offer of induction to older women, which research has long shown are at greater risk of losing their baby just around the time when they are preparing for birth, could save babies' lives."

Diarrhoea bug – protecting babies

A new vaccination programme, planned for later this year, will see babies under four months vaccinated against rotavirus – a highly infectious bug that causes around 140,000 diarrhoea cases a year in children under five.

It is estimated that the Rotarix vaccine, manufactured by GSK, will halve the number of cases with 70% fewer hospital stays as a result. It will be given to infants orally in two separate doses, alongside other routine vaccines.

The programme is expected to cost around £25m a year but is expected to save the NHS around £20m per year through fewer stays in hospital, fewer GP and A&E visits and fewer calls to NHS Direct.

Tackling alcohol exposure before birth

A report from the FASD Trust proposes a new approach to identify alcohol exposure in the womb and enable those affected to access consistent support.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) – an umbrella term for a range of conditions caused when a developing fetus is exposed to alcohol in the womb – are estimated to affect around 8,000 births per year. Guidelines for assessing and diagnosing FASD have been set at an international level, but there has been no established process, or care pathway, in the UK for recording information about FASD, referring people for support or agreement on the issues that need to be explored.

The FASD Trust report, entitled ‘*Consensus Statement Regarding the Recognition and Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Across the Lifespan in the UK: Development of Proposed UK Clinical Pathways*’, has been produced by a collaboration of nearly 70 medical experts from across the UK.

To see the report, visit the FASD Trust www.fasdtrust.co.uk

Increase in birth defects arising from multiple births

A study published in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* suggests that the number of congenital anomalies arising from multiple births has almost doubled since the 1980s.

This study, led by the University of Ulster, found that the prevalence of congenital anomalies from multiple births increased from 5.9 (1984-1987) to 10.7 (2004-2007) per 10,000 births. Furthermore, the risk of birth defects was 27% higher in multiple than singleton births. The authors indicate that this increase may be related to assisted reproductive technologies, although this needs further research.

Multiple births with congenital anomalies were more than twice as likely to be stillbirths compared to singleton births and more than twice as likely to suffer early neonatal death.

1. **Boyle B. et al.** Trends in the prevalence, risk and pregnancy outcome of multiple births with congenital anomaly: a registry-based study in 14 European countries 1984-2007. *BJOG* 2013;DOI:10.1111/1471-0528.12146.

£25 million maternity unit makeover

More than 100 hospitals will secure funding to improve and upgrade their maternity units. Several older maternity hospitals will be refurbished and there will be funding for a large number of simple measures that improve choice for women and their experience of maternity care. Across the country, the improvements will include:

- almost 40 new birthing pools
- eight new midwife-led units
- more en suite facilities
- more family rooms that allow dads and families to stay overnight, supporting women while in labour or if their baby needs neonatal care

■ better bereavement facilities

The funding comes from a £25 million government pot to improve maternity units nationwide. To receive a share of the money, local NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts had to prove that their patients wanted the improvements. A panel, that included representatives from the Royal College of Midwives and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, judged the bids.

The Royal College of Midwives’ Chief Executive Cathy Warwick says: “It is great to learn about the positive changes that this extra £25m will make to many units up and down the country.”



Brothers Alex and Daniel.

Funding given to research rare disease

Action Medical Research has announced continued investment into vital research to help babies and children affected by rare and devastating diseases for which there is no cure.

Dr Emyr Lloyd-Evans of Cardiff University has been awarded funding by the charity to investigate two drugs that might benefit children with the rare metabolic condition, Smith-Lemli-Opitz syndrome (SLOS). Children with SLOS can have severe birth defects, neurological decline, life-threatening heart defects and autism spectrum disorders. There is no cure and no

proven effective treatment.

Brothers Alex and Daniel have both been diagnosed with the condition. When Alex was born, his mum knew something wasn’t right. “His spine was curved and I thought his head shape looked strange,” she recalls. As a baby he barely slept: he vomited every two to three hours a night and didn’t grow much during his first six months. When Daniel was born, he had similar problems and had a hole in his heart. At just one day old he needed heart surgery, followed by further operations at three months’ and two years’ old.