**Lessons learnt from opening a mother-baby unit: Qualitative evaluation of staff experiences**

Grace Branjerdporn, Susan Roberts1, Damian Hughes1, Kylie Henderson1, Debra Creedy2

1. Gold Coast University Hospital, Queensland Health, Gold Coast, Australia
2. Griffith University, Logan, Australia

[grace.branjerdporn@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:grace.branjerdporn@health.qld.gov.au)

*Background:* The postpartum is considered a high-risk time for women to develop first onset or relapse with serious mental illnesses. While mother and baby units (MBUs) are considered best practice treatment to improve maternal mental health and concurrently support maternal-infant attachment, many states and territories in Australia do not have MBUs, leading to a shortage of specialised services. Queensland recently opened their first public MBU two years ago with four beds in Gold Coast. This qualitative study evaluates the experiences and perceptions of staff involved in the development of a statewide specialised psychiatric MBU.

*Methodology*: Multidisciplinary staff who were currently or previously employed were interviewed with individual semi-structured interviews. Interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes, were conducted by a trained qualitative researcher. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, de-identified and thematically analysed using Braun and Clark’s methodology. Themes are cross-checked within the investigating team to ensure accuracy and agreeance.

*Results*: Participants had worked in the Unit from one month to two and a half years, and came from a variety of backgrounds (e.g., executive staff, medical officers, nursing staff, allied health practitioners). Staff members reported a range of themes including: training required to upskill clinicians in perinatal and infant mental health, value of innovative initiatives to improve clinical services, importance of the built environment, creation of an effective team, and ‘finding’ their specialised role.

*Conclusion*: Overall, this study highlights the challenges and facilitators for the development and establishment of a new MBU. Considerations for other states planning for a new MBU include: training of staff needs to be strategic and recurrent so that staff feel confident to define their role, staff need to be involved in continuous improvement to ensure that the highest quality of service is delivered, team-building opportunities should be intentional, and the physical environment should be thoughtfully planned.