



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1426](#)

Main Petitioner: Donna Scott

Subject: National Donor Milk Bank Service

Calls on Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure equal access to donor breast milk for all premature and sick babies, irrespective of geographical location, by establishing a national donor milk bank service.

Background

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate the short and long term benefits of breastfeeding for both for mothers and infants¹. The [World Health Organisation](#) recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age. For pre-term babies the recognised benefits of breast milk include reduced time on parenteral nutrition (the intravenous administration of nutrients), reduced risk of infection, and reduced risk of necrotising enterocolitis (NEC²)³.

Milk banks

Milk banks collect and store expressed breast milk. Breast milk is expressed by donors, with babies under 6 months old, who are pre-screened using health and lifestyle questionnaire and blood virology screening. The donated milk is pasteurised before being used. Donated breast milk is often used for unwell or premature babies whose own mothers cannot breast feed them⁴. There are 17 milk banks across the UK, one is in Scotland. All milk banks are members of the [United Kingdom Association for Milk Banking](#).

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has published guidelines on [donor breast milk banks](#). However, clinical guidelines published by NICE have no formal status in Scotland and are for information only. In Scotland the

¹ Scottish Government (2011) [Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action](#)

² NEC is a serious illness in which tissues in the intestine become inflamed and start to die. This can lead to a perforation developing which allows the contents of the intestine to leak into the abdomen and can cause a very dangerous infection. [Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children](#) (2002).

³ NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2012) Information on a proposed National Donor Milk Bank service for Scotland. Unpublished.

⁴ BabyCentre (2011) [Milk Banking](#)

[Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network](#) develops guidelines that contain recommendations for effective practice in the NHS in Scotland based on current evidence. It is not intending to publish guidelines on milk banks.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Donor Milk Bank

The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Donor Milk Bank was established in 1978. The milk bank provides donor breast milk for infants within its neonatal services. It also provides donor milk, on request, for neighbouring health boards. The service has expanded significantly in the past 2-3 years both in the processing of donor milk and the number of babies who receive milk:

	Pasteurised litres	Donors	Recipients
2008	102.8	35	32
2009	317.15	42	84
2010	263.5	45	89
2011	427.35	64	104

Source: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2012).

Donor milk across Scotland

Information received from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde notes that there has been an increasing and significant level of interest in donor milk across Scotland. The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Donor Milk Bank has been able to meet the informal demand from neighbouring health boards to access donor milk for the most vulnerable infants. In 2011/12 Greater Glasgow and Clyde used 150.8 litres of donor milk, NHS Lanarkshire used 14 litres, NHS Ayrshire and Arran used 2 litres and NHS Lothian used 14.6 litres. In 2011 40.6% of donors came from outwith the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde board area. [The Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service](#) (ScotsERVS) currently transports donor milk to requesting units and collects milk from donor's homes³.

Proposed service models

Information received from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde notes that, an equitable, national service cannot be provided without some degree of reorganisation and further funding³. In an unpublished paper different service models are considered. These are:

- to continue with the current service with or without adaptations
- to develop a centralised National Milk Bank coordinated and run on one site only
- to develop a National Milk Bank using a hub and spokes (depot) model

Scottish Government Action

In January 2011 the Scottish Government published [Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action](#). Alongside this the Government launched the [Breastfeeding: Feel Good Factor](#) website. This website has a section on the health benefits for babies and in particular for pre-term babies.

Scottish Parliament Action

There have been a number of recent motions and questions on this subject. Most recently [S4O-00877](#) was answered by Michael Matheson, Minister for Public Health, on 29 March 2012.

Mark McDonald: To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to increase the availability of donated breast milk in neo-natal units

Michael Matheson: The Scottish Government is aware that breast milk is the recommended form of enteral nutrition for all infants, especially those born pre-term and we recognise the valuable service that donor milk banks provide. The Scottish Emergency Rider Volunteer Service (ScotsERVS) now supports the transportation of processed donor milk to requesting units and provides a local ongoing and sustainable service across the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board area and into neighbouring health boards. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is currently exploring options to provide equitable access to donor breast milk across all of Scotland.

On [2 February 2012](#) the issue was also raised by Elaine Smith MSP.

Elaine Smith: In her discussions with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has the cabinet secretary discussed the positive contribution made by Scotland's only breast milk bank, which is based at Yorkhill, to the health of sick and premature babies? Will she urge other health boards to consider providing such a service?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Elaine Smith for her question and for her on-going interest in that issue. As she said, Glasgow hosts the only breast milk bank in Scotland. I recently attended an event in Glasgow to mark the fact that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has become the first health authority in the whole United Kingdom to achieve the United Nations baby-friendly accreditation, which is a great credit to all those who work there. I assure Elaine Smith that I will discuss the issue with officials in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and involve officials in other health boards to see whether further steps require to be taken.

Motion [S3M-7435](#) was lodged in November 2010 congratulating NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Milk Bank for its work on improving the health of some of Scotland's most vulnerable infants and asked ministers, members and NHS boards across Scotland to further explore the benefits of this approach for high-risk infants.

Lizzy Burgess
Senior Researcher
17 April 2012

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@scottish.parliament.uk

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.