**THE SINGING UNIT - CAN A MUSIC THERAPY WORKSHOP IN A NEONATAL UNIT INCREASE PARENTS’ ABILITY BOND WITH THEIR BABIES AND REDUCE ANXIETY?**

**A MIXED METHODS PILOT STUDY UNDERTAKEN BY ELIZABETH COOMBES**

This pilot study commenced at the Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil with full ethical approval on 26 September 2019 when recruitment began, and ended on 12 December 2019.

Music therapy in the neonatal setting with premature babies and their families is a growing area of practice for our profession. This pilot aimed to provide such evidence in the UK. The focus of the study was the parent-infant relationship and whether the workshop could improve parental bonding and wellbeing by reducing anxiety, and empowering parents in caring for their babies.

The study aimed to recruit 10 families of premature babies hospitalised in a local neonatal unit and deliver a music therapy workshop to small groups of parents. Twelve parents from 9 families in all completed the study with 3 fathers participating. The workshop was to give parents the tools they needed to be able to use Infant Directed singing with their babies. This has been proven to sooth babies and create optimal bonding conditions.

When families were recruited into the study they completed baseline quantitative measures looking at bonding, wellbeing and depression and anxiety. These measures were repeated at discharge along with a questionnaire to understand their feelings about the workshop. They also completed a questionnaire post-workshop about the experience with the music therapist.

The data showed major improvement in parental wellbeing with minor improvements in bonding and reduced anxiety. Parental perception of the workshop itself was massively positive with many referencing it helping them bond with their baby. Parents said it helped them interact with their baby. It made them feel happy and relaxed. One father stated ‘Seeing the baby’s positive response made me feel useful’. Several parents also used the word ‘connected’ relating to feelings towards the baby.

A report has been send to the UHB, with an article in review with the Journal for Neonatal Nursing. A Roundtable featuring this work is also being presented at the BAMT conference, and it will also be part of the International Association for Music and Medicine Conference in Boston in May. There are other presentations planned at the University of South Wales to staff and students.

The UHB is exploring options to roll this workshop out to other neonatal wards, and discussions are beginning as to the potential to undertake a larger study using this method.