

Treatment of tongue tie
16HDC01563, 29 November 2018

*Lactation consultant ~ Tongue tie ~ Frenotomy ~ Bleeding ~
Vitamin K ~ Informed consent ~ Rights 4(1), 6(2)*

A mother rang a lactation consultant for advice and support for breastfeeding when her baby was five days old.

The lactation consultant attended the woman at her home. She assessed the baby and mother, and diagnosed the baby with a tongue tie. She recommended a frenotomy to release the tongue tie and provided the parents with information about the procedure.

The lactation consultant asked the parents whether the baby had received a vitamin K injection at birth, and they told her that he had not. She did not advise the parents that there is a potential for significant blood loss following a frenotomy if the baby has not received vitamin K at birth.

The lactation consultant performed the frenotomy and there was some bleeding at the site as a result. She controlled the bleeding with compression using sterile gauze, and instructed the parents to call her if the bleeding started again. She then left their home. Later that afternoon the bleeding started again, and the mother controlled it with compression using sterile gauze.

At 6.30pm the bleeding started again. The father rang the lactation consultant, who told him to use compression on the site and to call an ambulance if the bleeding continued. The bleeding stopped.

At 8pm, the bleeding started again and the parents were unable to control it. They called an ambulance but they were unable to contact the lactation consultant. The baby was transferred to hospital, where he received a vitamin K injection and the bleeding was controlled.

Findings

The lactation consultant decided to perform the frenotomy despite the baby not having been given vitamin K, and she failed to review the baby in person or to refer him to hospital when she became aware of the episode of bleeding that occurred after she had left the baby's home. Accordingly, services were not provided with reasonable skill and care, and the lactation consultant breached Right 4(1).

The lactation consultant did not offer the parents non-surgical alternatives to a frenotomy, and did not advise them of the increased risk of significant bleeding for a baby who has not received a vitamin K injection. In not providing this information, the lactation consultant failed to give the parents the information that a reasonable consumer would need in order to make an informed choice, and accordingly breached Right 6(2).

Without the information outlined above, the parents were unable to make an informed choice and give informed consent to the frenotomy on behalf of their baby. Accordingly, the lactation consultant breached Right 7(1) of the Code.

Recommendations

In the provisional opinion, it was recommended that the Midwifery Council undertake a competency review of the lactation consultant's performance of frenotomies. The Midwifery Council advised that a competency review was undertaken and specific recommendations made, and that no further action is considered necessary.

It was recommended that the lactation consultant provide a letter of apology to the baby's parents.