


BBC investigation finds NHS interpreting service problems contributed to baby deaths and serious brain injuries

14 December 2023  Sarah Brewington

The BBC has [reported that](#) a recent investigation found interpreting issues were a contributing factor in at least 80 babies dying or suffering serious brain injuries in England between 2018 and 2022.

The [BBC's File on 4 programme](#) says it made a Freedom of Information request asking the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB) (which has now changed to the Maternity and Newborn Safety Investigations programme "MNSI") to review all investigations from 2018-2022 that involved cases of babies dying or being diagnosed with a severe brain injury in the first seven days of life. It found that of the 2,607 reviewed cases, 80 included references to interpretation or communication problems due to language difficulties in the recommendation section of the report, which it therefore considered to be a contributing factor to death or brain injury.

Hassan Shehata from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is reported to have told the BBC the service was "failing some of the most vulnerable people in society" while language barriers "further exacerbate the risk with women struggling to access, engage with maternity services and communicate their concerns to healthcare professionals".

The BBC reported that NHS England said the [interpreting] service was vital for patient safety and a review would identify whether and how it can support improvements in the commissioning and delivery of services.

This BBC investigation comes in the wake of the publication of the Women and Equalities Committee report into black maternal health on 18 April 2023. The report found that black women are almost 4 times and Asian women 1.8 times more likely to die during childbirth than white women. You can read more about the findings in the report in [our article](#).

At Browne Jacobson we are committed to working at the forefront of society's biggest issues and to promoting social mobility and eliminating racial disparity. We talked about the innovative steps being taken by two Trusts trying to do just that at our recent [Shared Insights session on racial disparities in healthcare](#). We were thrilled to be joined by Dr Angie Doshani, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist who has been at the forefront of developing health technology for University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. In partnership with the community she has created the JANAM app, a mobile app which is designed to improve access to pregnancy information for patients of the Trust whose first language is not English. We were also delighted to welcome Carol King-Stephens, Equality Diversity & Inclusion Lead Midwife, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, who shared the practical steps being taken in her Trust to address racial inequalities affecting pregnancy care, including the impact on access to services, effective interventions, providing culturally aware support and information, and improving pregnancy outcomes. [Click here](#) for the note of the session.

We were grateful to be able to share these valuable insights with attendees at the session which included a forum for discussion and questions from attendees, and we continue to work with Trusts on these challenging issues.

If you would like our help please get in touch. We have a specialist Maternity Division within our Health Advisory and Litigation department and can offer review of internal policies and procedures to ensure equity and deep dive thematic review of complaints to identify themes, trends and learning. Our data specialists can provide end-to-end data and regulatory support and advice to help with technological development and deployment should you wish to develop your own technology to address translation or any other issues.

If you would like to register for Shared Insights which takes place monthly via MS Teams and covers a wide variety of topics, please [click here](#). To see our Maternity Services Resources Hub for more useful information including a series of maternity mock inquest films and more details on the maternity related services we offer [click here](#).

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