

Inquiry into teenage pregnancy

Action for Sick Children Scotland

I write on behalf of Action for Sick Children Scotland, a charity dedicated to the needs of sick children and their families and with a long track record in identifying the health care needs of children and young people

The deadline for this consultation precludes a detailed response and so limited points follow:

1. Teenagers who are pregnant and mothers of young babies are themselves in need of specific health care as adolescents - physically at risk for bone mineralisation deficiency exacerbated by pregnancy and with very different emotional responses than older women. Adolescents commonly find hospitalisation and the clinic environment alien and frightening and this may lead to apparent non-engagement in health services. Appropriate service environments may enhance their health care during pregnancy and after delivery
2. The reality of parenthood is unlikely to affect teenagers when personal health and sexual health education is largely theoretical. Peer education by teenage mothers might help younger adolescents to understand the impact of single parenthood on their own and their family's lives. In light of adolescent mental health and development it might be appropriate to involve health psychologists rather than teachers or school nurses in supporting teenage women in making decisions about relationships and sexual health behaviours.
3. Teenage women who are in a stable relationship and have planned parenthood should be supported in their choice and offered appropriate services that do not discriminate against them on grounds of age
4. To reduce the negative impact on the infant there is a need to consider how supported accommodation should be offered to young single mothers so that they are less isolated if they are not living with parents and so have no role models or close advisors to whom to turn for advice and help in caring for their child.
5. There is much evidence that teenagers are greatly influenced by medial role models and so engaging media figures in any campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy might be effective - emphasising the age when media stars become pregnant etc.

Dr Una Mac Fadyen
Consultant Paediatrician
Forth Valley Royal Hospital
Action for Sick Children Scotland

11 February 2013