

Canterbury Initiative Tongue Tie Release - Update

Bulletin updating information about Tongue Tie assessment, referral and treatment.

Tongue Tie Release Pathway Update

A new clinical pathway for infants with breastfeeding difficulties related to ankyloglossia was introduced in February 2017. The pathway was developed following wide hospital and community consultation, a trial of a new tongue assessment tool and audit of feeding outcomes in infants who received a frenotomy or were declined a frenotomy in 2016.

The goals of the new pathway were to support mothers and babies to breastfeed by

1. Ensuring that all possible causes for Breastfeeding (BF) difficulties are considered.
2. Ensuring that interventions to support BF are evidence based.
3. Ensuring that unnecessary surgery is avoided.
4. Using precious BF resources wisely to support mothers and babies in hospital and the community

The new tongue tie release pathway is evidence based and includes both an objective assessment of tongue function along with a specialist breastfeeding assessment for every baby who may require frenotomy surgery. The frenotomy rate has dropped at Christchurch Women's Hospital from 11.6% in 2015 to a projected 3.5% for 2017 which equates to 500 fewer tongue tie releases in 2017 compared with 2015.

The feeding outcomes for all babies who attended the Christchurch Women's Hospital tongue tie release clinic were audited over the first 6 months of 2016 and first 3 months of 2017. There was no statistical difference in feeding methods before and after frenotomy surgery between the group of infants who received a frenotomy and the group of infants who did not receive a frenotomy.

This change has resulted in some positive outcomes

- As the number of frenotomy procedures dropped - the inpatient lactation consultants have had time to focus on more mothers and babies on the ward.
- The pathway involves a thorough breastfeeding assessment and these are available at no charge both in hospital and in the community with the RCPHO service and St George's clinic.
- Frenotomy surgery in neonates is provided by medical specialists - Neonatologists and a Paediatric Otorhinolaryngologist.
- Many babies have avoided unnecessary surgery and their mothers have benefited from community and hospital based lactation consultant support and advice.
- The new pathway is now multidisciplinary, standardised, evidence based and transparent.

Education programs to update health providers about ankyloglossia and breastfeeding were well attended throughout the year. Information was updated on both HealthPathways and HealthInfo, and continues to be regularly accessed.

Informal feedback from community and hospital clinicians has been very positive. The change process has worked well and now seems to be business as usual.

Tongue Tie Working Group

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