8.2.4 BLOCKED DUCTS

AIM

- To provide healthcare providers with the appropriate information to manage block ducts effectively.
- To nurture a mother’s confidence in her ability to breastfeed.

KEY POINTS

1. A blocked duct presents as a breast lump, which is tender and sometimes a painful red area. The milk builds up behind the blockage causing inflammation of the surrounding tissues.\(^1,2\)
2. Blocked ducts most commonly occur at about 3-4 months of lactation. A common cause is a ‘white bleb/spot’ on the nipple.
3. Mothers who have a large milk supply can be prone to blocked ducts or mastitis. It is especially important for them to be aware of preventative measures. They may also need to vary feeding positions regularly to ensure each area of breast is drained.\(^3\)

PREVENTION

- Unrestricted breastfeeding from birth i.e. feeding 8-12 times in 24 hours.
- Correct positioning and attachment and good sucking action is vital for good milk transfer.
- Dummies and complimentary feeds should not be used.
- Avoid restriction from tight bra / clothing – advise to wear a crop top.
- Avoid long intervals between feeds.

MANAGEMENT

2. Consult the above preventative measures and correct if necessary.
3. Gently stroke the breast towards the nipple before, and as, baby breastfeeds.
4. If the lump is still present after feeding, express breast with an electric pump.
5. Use a single pumping action only.
6. Check the pump equipment is correctly fitted, including the correct diameter shield.
7. Ensure only a gentle even pressure is exerted on the breast tissue by the shield of the electric pump.
8. Refer to a physiotherapist for ultrasound treatment prior to the next feed if the problem is not resolved by the above measures.
9. Drain the breast thoroughly within 20 minutes of the ultrasound therapy.
10. Commence on anti inflammatories e.g. Ibuprofen, if blockage persists.
11. If the breast becomes red, hot and painful and the mother becomes unwell, suspect mastitis. See Clinical Guidelines, Section B 8.2.6 Mastitis and Section B 8.2.6.2 Mastitis Management in the Home.

DISCHARGE PLANNING

1. Variance sheet ‘MR 261.15 Blocked mild ducts’ to be continued at home.
2. Arrange breast pump hire.
3. Arrange a follow up appointment with the physiotherapy department.
4. Arrange a follow up appointment with the Breastfeeding Centre.
5. Review and add Variance sheet.

REFERENCES