Slimming World joined the RCM Alliance programme in January 2012 to work together using the extensive network of Slimming World’s groups and the efforts of midwives, to improve the health of women and their babies. Over the past three years both organisations have grown. Slimming World now has over 13,000 weekly UK groups and continues to be the only national weight management organisation that supports pregnant and breast-feeding women. The RCM represents midwives, midwife students and midwife support workers across the UK, and has over 44,000 members. In this newsletter Slimming World provides a recap of policy, achievements, an update on a new maternal NICE quality standard and future research plans.

New NICE quality standard

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently published a quality standard for maternal and child nutrition, recommending that ‘pregnant women attending antenatal and health visitor appointments are given advice on how to eat healthily in pregnancy’ and ‘women with a BMI of 30 or more after childbirth are offered a structured weight loss programme’.

It’s pleasing that this standard recommends that women with a BMI of 30 or more should be offered structured weight loss support through the NHS. Our own data at Slimming World shows that we already help post-natal women to adopt healthier habits, lose weight and improve their confidence and self-esteem and so we welcome this recommendation. However, our feeling is that this guidance really is a missed opportunity to encourage the same level of support for the prevention of excess weight gain during pregnancy, when women arguably need it most.

Pregnancy is a time when women often feel vulnerable and uncertain and are most open to advice about the best way to manage their health and weight. Couple that with concerns for the health of their unborn child and it’s easy to see why women who are already struggling with their weight may benefit from extra support.

However, the NICE quality standard misses the opportunity to address healthy weight management in pregnancy and to recommend high quality support for pregnant women who are worried about their weight. Slimming World and the RCM will continue to lobby for a change in the support offered to pregnant women.

Visit http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs98 to read the quality standard.
Reminder of Slimming World’s pregnancy policy

Having worked with the RCM to develop a policy on the best way to support pregnant members, Slimming World is proud to be the only national weight management organisation to offer women healthy lifestyle support through every stage of their pregnancy.

Mary women join a weight management group after gaining weight during pregnancy. We’re committed to supporting those looking to manage their weight when they’re trying to conceive, after the birth of their baby, and importantly throughout their pregnancy (rather than turn members away or ask them to leave).

We don’t encourage weight loss or ‘dieting’ during pregnancy and instead support women to prevent excess weight gain, by continuing with (or adopting) a balanced, healthy diet and remaining physically active. We don’t advise pregnant women on how much weight they should gain (or indeed lose) and our Consultants are guided by any recommendations made by the member’s healthcare team (usually their midwife). Our research shows that women who attend Slimming World while pregnant make more healthy lifestyle choices and feel healthier.

Importantly, pregnancy is a time when women are more likely to seek to adopt healthy behaviours, providing a good foundation for healthy families in the future.

Any member wishing to continue attending their Slimming World group during pregnancy can do so, providing they gain the support of their midwife – this is crucial for a number of reasons:

• To ensure they discuss their intention to continue attending Slimming World (to give you the opportunity to support her decision)
• To ensure there’s no pregnancy-related medical reason why following a healthy balanced diet and remaining physically active would be unadvisable at this time
• To provide an opportunity for you to notify the Slimming World Consultant of any specific support you would like us to provide (eg lifestyle changes) and give any suggestions regarding her weight management (if this is appropriate)
• To ensure that the member feels completely supported by both Slimming World and her healthcare team in adopting healthy lifestyle habits throughout her pregnancy and beyond.

How does it work in practice?

• A booklet detailing the current recommendations for healthy eating and food safety during pregnancy and breast-feeding and how our eating plan fits with this (pictured above) is provided free of charge to all pregnant and breast-feeding members.
• We also provide a Pregnancy Weight Management Form for members to bring to you as their midwife, to review and sign at each antenatal appointment.
• The form has a section for you to provide any recommendations or suggestions you’ve discussed with the member regarding their weight management. The member’s Slimming World Consultant will then discuss this with them when they return to group.
• We have procedures in place to monitor members closely during their pregnancy. Any weight losses are closely monitored, investigated and reported back to their health care team.

For more information email public.health@slimmingworld.co.uk or call 01773 546091
Available resources
Since Slimming World began working in partnership with the RCM, our organisations have developed a range of tools, as suggested by you, to improve the support given to both midwives and pregnant women. These include:

**Discussing weight during pregnancy booklet**
Supporting women to manage their weight during pregnancy can have huge benefits for both mother and baby, but discussing a woman’s weight can sometimes be difficult. The **Discussing weight during pregnancy booklet** (pictured left) is designed to help you identify and discuss a woman’s weight and possible weight-related risks during her pregnancy in a sensitive way. Printed copies of the resource can be requested at public.health@slimmingworld.co.uk

Following feedback from some midwives working with women whose BMI lies outside the existing chart, we have created an extended version of the chart which can be accessed via the RCM website at www.rcm.org.uk/about/who-we-work-with/slimming

**Slimming World/RCM website**
To help women successfully manage their weight before, during and after one of the most exciting events in their lives, Slimming World and the RCM created a joint website. The website is aimed at women who are trying for a baby, are already pregnant or have a new baby. It contains helpful advice on eating well, staying active, living a healthier lifestyle and managing weight. The website can be found at www.slimmingworld.co.uk/mums and you can order cards (pictured right) to help signpost women in your care to the site. To order the cards please email public.health@slimmingworld.co.uk

**i-learn**
Boost your learning and contribute to your CPD requirement by taking the ‘Obesity: Supporting Women’ module as part of the RCM’s i-learn package for midwives. This module, developed last year, looks at the possible stigma and prejudice that women who are overweight face, the barriers to discussing weight, tips and advice on raising the issue sensitively – including audio examples showing good (and not so good) practice – and advice on supporting a healthy lifestyle. The module is available to all RCM members at www.rcm.org.uk, within the i-learn section of the website.
Research and development
Slimming World has an active research programme which includes research into pregnancy and postnatal weight management. Here’s an update of our latest projects and findings:

During pregnancy
A feasibility study with midwives in Cardiff indicated that attending Slimming World during pregnancy had no detrimental effect on length of pregnancy and birth weight. Using IOM guidelines, 94% of women avoided excess weight gain during their pregnancy and postnatally breastfeeding rates were higher than the national average. From the feasibility study a large-scale Randomised Controlled Trial was developed looking at the benefits of healthy behaviour change and weight management support during pregnancy in the UK. The HELP Study (Healthy Eating in Lifestyle and Pregnancy) has now come to a close and is currently being written up by the research team from the University of Cardiff.

Postnatal evidence
Slimming World conducted a survey involving 1,015 women who had joined a local group postnatally for weight management support. Most women engaged in the programme between 6-26 weeks after giving birth. The most common reasons for engaging were to improve their health and self-confidence and how they felt about their body shape and size, rather than due to any social or media pressure or recommendation from a healthcare professional. Attendance resulted in significant weight loss and increases in self-esteem, self-confidence and wellbeing. These findings have been submitted for scientific publication.

Furthering our research into postnatal weight management, Slimming World is about to embark on a research trial entitled ‘A two arm feasibility trial of lifestyle information and Slimming World groups to promote weight management and positive lifestyle behaviour in postnatal women from an ethnically diverse inner city population’. This study will look at the benefits of providing women with support postnatally, which is discussed with them by their midwife in the antenatal period. The research is due to start in December 2015.

Get in touch
As always it's really valuable to have feedback from you on our work. If you have any questions or comments about the work we’re doing please get in touch at public.health@slimmingworld.co.uk

Please share your thoughts
To gain a better understanding of how we can support you, we’ve developed a survey for midwives. It should only take around five minutes and we’d welcome your feedback. As a thank you for participating, you’ll be entered into a prize draw to win a £50 Marks and Spencer voucher. To take the survey, which closes on 30th November, please visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SWRCM15

References