

Comparing the Antenatal system between Colmar, France and the Vale of White Horse District

During the summer of 2011, we investigated and compared the antenatal and postnatal systems at home: 'The Vale of White Horse District' and the twinning town 'Colmar': a large town situated in the region of Alsace, on the east of France. I concentrated on the Antenatal systems which have proven to me as being incredibly vast, both in Colmar and the Vale of White Horse District. However, it was hugely interesting learning the similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses between the two.

Firstly, these tables outline the dates of Antenatal appointments for pregnant women:

Week	Colmar, France (table from the Carnet de santé Maternité from Conseils Général Haut-Rhin page 12)	Vale of White Horse (Information from NICE guidance NHS: http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG062PublicInfo.pdf)
	Date of Last menstrual period (LMP)	
1-4	Start of your pregnancy	
5-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First antenatal consultation • First Ultrasound scan (around 12 weeks from amenorrhoea) • Non-compulsory antenatal care/interview (individual or a couple) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstly contact midwife/doctor • Booking appointment (First Antenatal appointment, around 10 weeks) • First Ultrasound scan (Second Antenatal appointment, 10-13 weeks)
14-17	Second antenatal consultation	Third Antenatal appointment (16 weeks)
18-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third antenatal consultation • Second Ultrasound scan (around 22 weeks from amenorrhoea) 	Second Ultrasound scan (18-20 weeks)
22-26	Fourth antenatal consultation	Fourth Antenatal appointment (25 weeks)
27-30	Fifth antenatal consultation	Fourth Antenatal/ Fifth Antenatal appointment (28 weeks)
31-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixth antenatal consultation • Third Ultrasound scan (around 32 weeks from amenorrhoea) • Consultation with anaesthesiologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixth Antenatal appointment (31 weeks) • Fifth Antenatal appointment/Seventh Antenatal appointment (34 weeks)
36-41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seventh antenatal consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixth Antenatal appointment/Eighth Antenatal appointment (36weeks) • Seventh Antenatal appointment/Ninth Antenatal appointment (38 weeks) • Tenth Antenatal appointment (40 weeks) • Eight Antenatal appointment/Eleventh Antenatal appointment (41 weeks)

■ ← Extra appointments if this is your first baby

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September 2011

Colmar, France:

During our 2 weeks in Colmar, we were able to visit and research at some of the places that offered antenatal care. In Colmar, there are two hospitals that offer this: 'Albert Schweitzer' (which mainly offers private care), 'Le Parc' (The specialised maternity hospital) and the 'Cabinet de Sages-Femmes' de PMI: a separate group of midwives who work with these hospitals, concentrating only on antenatal and postnatal care. All the antenatal care provided by these, along with any other needs required for the pregnant woman are covered economically by the 'Social Security' (equivalent to the NHS), including 'Albert Schweitzer' although not fully. Furthermore, the first 2 ultrasound scans are only 70% covered by the Social Security. Women in Colmar are able to choose which of the care they prefer out of these choices, depending on what they personally feel is right for them and in discussion.

In Colmar, all the maternity units follow the guidelines from the 'Carnet de santé Maternité' from the 'Conseil Général Haut-Rhin'. This is a booklet given to women for her to keep from her health insurance or the 'PMI' (maternal and child health council) after she attends the first antenatal examination. This booklet contains: fact sheets of advice and preparation, the care given to her, a step by step guide on what the woman needs to do before birth, an antenatal medical record which is filled in by health professionals and lastly contacts. Additional information is also provided in websites (e.g. http://www.naitre-en-alsace.org/filim/Annuaire_jeunes_parents_07.pdf a parent's guide to having a baby in Alsace).

Within this booklet, it states that women are required to attend 7 antenatal medical consultations and examinations as ordered in the table above. However, 'Le Parc' hospital offers up to an optional 8 courses. These are offered to women, whether it's their first birth or second birth etc. However at the 'Cabinet de Sages- Femmes', they state that within reason and if necessary, extra consultations are not limited and are still covered by the Social Security. Firstly, when a woman finds out they're pregnant, they have to set an appointment with their doctor/ midwife for their first antenatal consultation; this is usually within 12 weeks from amenorrhoea. At this consultation, they provide an ultrasound scan to determine the date of birth of the baby, plan a calendar of medical consultations and plan the place of birth of the woman's choice. Also, this is the time where women have to provide their medical history to adapt the monitoring of their pregnancy, including any information about any treatment taken before birth. After this consultation, women are given 3 declarations of pregnancy forms to complete, before the 14th week of pregnancy. The 1st two are sent to their benefits entitlement (Caisse d'Allocation Familiale) for maternity benefits and the 3rd is sent to the centre of insurance disease (CPAM) for entitlement for any scientific examinations from the women during their pregnancy.

In addition, before just 3 months of pregnancy, women are also offered to attend an additional, non-compulsory antenatal care/interview with a midwife/doctor. This is a conversation, allowing the woman or the couple to discuss anything one-to-one with the midwife/doctor about their difficulties socially, psychologically, and physically, as well as their needs and expectations to find ways on how to deal with them. Also this is a chance to ask questions and get feedback from the midwife/doctors, to allow the woman to have a healthy pregnancy. At 'Le Parc', they have specialists to help with any

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of these problems: a psychiatrist that can offer counselling for certain situations e.g. depression, a social worker in addition to offering acupuncture and hypnosis if necessary- as 2 midwives are trained for this. Also at 'Hôpital Pasteur' (also in Colmar), they offer help for women suffering alcohol, smoking and addiction problems. Also, there are midwives who are able to give care in the woman's home in Colmar: 'Sage Femme de PMI' who also works alongside 'Le Parc'. These are also all covered by the social security.

Afterwards from the 4th month of pregnancy, women start attending their 7 antenatal classes. These are done either in groups of no more than 6 people or individually and become more frequent towards the birth date. These sessions according to the 'Carnet de santé Maternité' cover 4 main points:

- Opportunity to ask questions that concern you and to be able to talk to other women
- The welcoming of your baby: their arrival/health and especially breastfeeding
- Know who to call if required or search for useful information and support groups for parenthood
- Propose physical exercises to allow you to have a better experience of bodily changes of your pregnancy and the birth.

The last consultation specialises in the care given on your birth.

Also, there is the option for women to have a midwife come to their house to provide information, support and prepare for their birth from the 'Sage Femme de PMI' (part of Le Parc) if necessary for the woman.

Also, the women are required to attend 3 Ultrasound scans (dates see above table). Each of these scans have a precise purpose and meet up to medical needs for accurate results. The first scan confirms the date of your birth, the number of embryos that are inside, a nuchal translucency for discovery of potential chromosome disorders e.g Down's and any signs of abnormalities. The second scan concentrates on the morphology (bodily structure) of the foetus and its growth along with locating the placenta. Lastly, the 3rd scan which is similar to the second looks at the foetus growth and presenting and locating the placenta.

Before the last consultation, women also need to attend a compulsory consultation with an anaesthesiologist. There is one in 'Le Parc' where their job is to inform women about the roles for the birth and with the woman's permission, adapt the treatment for the woman's birth from their medical records. Also this is a time for women to ask any questions before the birth, and for the anaesthesiologist to ask question about any allergies- whether they've taken anaesthetics before etc. This consultation allows women to prepare for childbirth, especially if an emergency or intended caesarean is needed.

However in Colmar, antenatal maternity leave for the woman is up to 6 weeks; 2 weeks being compulsory. This therefore is quite short and is said to be one of the biggest disadvantages in Colmar. However, the amount does differ, depending on the amount of children you have already and whether they give birth to twins and triplets or more of which allows a larger antenatal maternity leave. More information on maternity leave in Colmar can be found on <http://asincoprob.free.fr/compterendus/contrattravail.htm>

Vale of White Horse District:

At the Vale of White Horse District, the main group of NHS midwives are based in Wantage Hospital: a branch from the John Radcliffe Hospital specialising in maternity. However, there are also NHS community midwives based in Abingdon in the Abingdon Surgery and Malthouse Surgery who also work alongside the John Radcliffe Hospital. They both follow the NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) guidance for antenatal care. Both the Social security in France and the NHS in England cover the costs for all pregnant women needs, which are both positive about each of the systems. At the Vale of White Horse District, we were able to visit an antenatal class in North Abingdon Children's Centre and speak to some of the midwives based in Abingdon. Along with this, there is all the information about antenatal care for pregnant women on the NHS websites which is hugely accessible and therefore excellent for women who wish to know about everything they need to know, without being surprised when it occurs.

The NHS states that when the woman knows they are pregnant, they have to inform a GP or a midwife as soon as possible. This allows them to organise your antenatal care suited to your medical and emotional needs, and 'give information about keeping healthy and ask whether you've had any previous health or pregnancy issues'. This is the first antenatal appointment (booking appointment). This is also where the midwife/GP provides you with a maternity note, which is required for women to bring along to all antenatal appointments to keep track of their pregnancy. The total number of antenatal appointments for woman with the first baby is around 10 and 7 for second/third etc. baby after contacting their midwife/GP.

At each appointment, there are specific subjects that women learn about their pregnancy. They can be either located at home, children's centres, your GP surgery or in a hospital depending on each woman's personal choice. In all appointments they encourage women to ask any questions and express any feelings. This is a positive indication of the antenatal system as emotional care is seen as highly important. The second appointment is usually the longest and this concentrates on informing the mother on further care availability (i.e. antenatal classes, breastfeeding workshops etc), nutrition and exercise, necessary health checks provided and examinations (i.e. calculate your BMI, measure blood pressure), opportunities to ask about mental illnesses as well as informing women about the 1st scan during 18-20 weeks. At the North Abingdon Children's Centre, they hold an antenatal class on the first Saturday of every month; morning/ afternoon. These classes allow women and couples to meet others to learn together; the limit being 12 people. This is much more of a bigger number compared to the amount of people in Colmar's antenatal sessions: 6 women which is a disadvantage in some ways, due to the fact there is a smaller ratio of midwives to pregnant women; however unlike in Colmar, the father is not usually allowed to attend these sessions, which limits their understanding of women pregnancy. Furthermore, this shows there is a shortage of midwives in the Vale of White Horse District which seems to be the biggest problem based on this antenatal system. However in Colmar, a shortage of midwives is said to also be a problem.

Similarly to Colmar, the appointments become more frequent and shorter towards the birth date; usually from 20-24 weeks onwards, where each appointment concentrates on the baby's growth and

development, checking your urine, preparing you for birth, informing you on postnatal depression and how and what to do after you've given birth. More information about what happens in each appointment can be found on this website:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG062PublicInfo.pdf> .Also, at these appointments, women have to attend 2 ultrasound scans. This is slightly different to the 3 scans that Colmar provide. The 1st scan concentrates on finding out when the baby is due and is usually done within 10-13 weeks and the 2nd scan (anomaly scan) checks for any structural abnormalities and is done between 10-20 weeks.

Women in the Vale of White Horse District are allowed maternity leave from 11 weeks before the beginning of the week of your birth. This is part of the Statutory Maternity Leave that is available for any employee no matter how long they've worked for the company and the amount of hours and the pay. This is only available for women who give an advance notice to their employer before 15 weeks from their birth date. This is a vast difference between Colmar as maternity leave before birth is only up to 6 weeks. Also due to the fact maternity leave is longer, any employees can either receive a Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) from the employer or a Maternity Allowance for lower paid employees through the council. SMP can be claimed by the woman by at least 28 days notification to their employer from when they want this to start along with proof of their pregnancy. Maternity Allowance is only eligible to some employees that aren't eligible for SMP. More information on maternity allowance can be found on this website:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/ExpectingOrBringingUpChildren/DG_10018869

Overall, there are many similarities between the two antenatal systems in Colmar and in the Vale of White Horse District from the content; on the other hand there are many slight and significant differences between them. This is like the declaration of birth in Colmar which is compulsory in order to continue with the antenatal care and the interview with an anaesthesiologist as in the Vale of White Horse District the content of some of this interview is incorporated within the antenatal appointments. Also, the maternity leave duration is 6 weeks maximum in Colmar for a mother with a single birth which is different to the 11 weeks they offer in the Vale of White Horse District.

Furthermore, the limit of people attending the antenatal sessions is also different numerically and a slight difference is like the amount of Ultrasound scans given. However, the advantages and disadvantages to each system is depends on each and every person's needs and their opinion on both systems. Nevertheless, in my opinion both are just as high-quality as each other but as everything in this world, there is always room for improvement. Personally, the main disadvantage from each antenatal system is: Vale of White Horse District: shortages of midwives and in Colmar: the short maternity leave before birth. But all in all visiting Colmar and researching in both areas have opened up my eyes and appreciated just how important and vast the antenatal systems are in order to cater for every mother's needs.