

Case Study – Approaches to Health

Emma Jones is 38 years old. She has 5 children. Ben is 12 years old, Amy is 10 years old, Ruby is 7 years old, Jack is 4 years old and Jade is 18 months. Emma's partner, Matt, left the family when Jade was born.

Matt lives with a new partner in a housing estate near to Emma's home. He drinks heavily and visits their children inconsistently. When he has had a lot to drink, he is loud and argumentative, which upsets all the children.

Emma has struggled to make ends meet since Matt left home. She worked part-time in a pub until Jade was born, but since then she has been unable to work because she has no-one to look after the children.

Emma does not smoke or drink but since she has been spending a lot of time in the house. She has been comfort eating and has gained about 2 stone in weight since Matt left. She has also felt depressed because she does not have any friends to go out with and her mother lives too far away to help with the children.

Her older children have caused her a lot of worries too. Ben has been refusing to go to school and the teacher has warned Emma that if he misses any more time, she will have no choice but to refer the family to social services. Amy has recently been in trouble with the police for shoplifting with a friend.

Emma went to her doctor six weeks ago after she discovered a small lump in her breast. She was referred to a consultant at a hospital several miles away who later performed a biopsy and has now been referred her to have her lump surgically removed. There is a possibility that Emma could require more radical surgery in the near future. Emma had agreed to have the lump removed but only as a day patient because she needs to get home to her children.

On the day of her surgery, Emma got the children ready for school and took the baby to a day nursery to be cared for while she was away. She arranged with a neighbour to collect the two youngest children and look after them until she returned home. Ruby and Amy would walk home from school together.

Emma did not have time for breakfast, but had a cup of tea and took some biscuits to eat on the bus on the way to the hospital.

When she arrived at the hospital, she started to worry about what her lump might mean. She feared the worst because her Nan had died of breast cancer 10 years ago and her mum had been treated for it 5 years ago. This may have had an impact on how Emma has reacted to her own diagnosis.

At the hospital, which is very big, Emma had to ask several people to help her find her way to the breast surgical unit before she finally arrived there at 10 am.

When she arrived at the ward, Emma started to feel really anxious because it was so busy with lots of people dashing here and there. Nobody seemed to have time for her so she waited in the doorway uncertain what to do next.

Jane Lloyd is 23 years old and has worked on the surgical unit as a newly qualified staff nurse for the past 6 months. She really enjoys her work and gets on well with all the other staff on the unit. Jane knows that the day ahead will be busy and there will be lots to do to keep on top of her workload.

Jane greeted Emma with a huge smile and started to assess her in readiness for her admission to the ward prior to her surgery. She noted that Emma was late for her appointment but decided not to say anything to her as she looked very flushed and worried.

The hospital had sent a letter by post beforehand giving information about being admitted to the surgical unit but Emma did not read it. One important instruction was that she should not eat or drink anything on the morning of her admission to hospital.

Jane asked Emma if she had had anything to eat or drink that morning and Emma told her that she'd had a cup of tea and biscuits about an hour before.

At this, Jane became agitated. She said to Emma:

"Why did you do that? We sent a letter telling you not to eat or drink before your operation."

Emma was shocked and retorted: "Well how was I to know, I've got better things to do than read letters!"

At this, Jane went to seek assistance from a senior staff nurse.

The senior staff nurse informed Emma: "Because you have had something to eat and drink you will have to go to the end of the list".

Emma became angry and protested: "That means I won't get home until late and my children will be waiting for me".

The senior staff nurse offered to ask the surgeon for advice and left Jane to finish her pre-operative assessment so that at least Emma will be ready for her surgery.

The surgeon agreed to accommodate Emma, but warned her that operations are delayed for many reasons and so it is important that she is fully prepared the next time if she has to undergo further surgery.