Call for Bounty bar

Growing numbers of new mums are angry at being approached on post-natal wards by reps from offers company Bounty. Giulia Crouch investigates

ANGRY mothers are appealing to the Government to ban Bounty sales representatives targeting women hours after they have given birth. Mumsnet, the nationwide parenting network, conducted a survey of more than 1,000 of its users and found that 82 per cent of them believed it was unacceptable for the commercial reps to have direct contact with mothers on maternity wards. Bounty is a UK-wide organisation which offers mothers antenatal and postnatal information and support. Bounty reps currently have access to maternity wards and approach new mothers with a free pack containing health advice, sample products, the child benefit form, commercial adverts and a paid photographic service for their newborns.

Mumsnet users have voiced a torrent of complaints. They claim representatives invade mothers’ privacy, approach mothers at inconvenient times, pressurise them into buying the photography service and do not make it clear that their details will be passed on to third parties. Justine Roberts, CEO of Mumsnet, said: “When we asked Mumsnet users for their experiences of Bounty sales reps on maternity wards we found compelling evidence of poor practice that clearly violates Bounty’s own code of conduct.”

“Over half of new mothers felt the Bounty representative invaded their privacy, nearly a third reported that the Bounty representative interrupted them while they were feeding their baby and 17 per cent say they were wrongly given the impression that they could not claim Child Benefit if they did not give their personal details to the Bounty representative.”

“Mumsnetters really don’t think hospital inpatients – particularly shortly after a gruelling physical event such as childbirth – should be subjected to such hard sell practices. Women rightly expect hospital wards to be a safe place, and targeting new mothers at their most vulnerable is simply not on.”

Over 26,000 people have signed a petition to stop commercial reps entering maternity wards and the network is calling on the public to write to their local NHS trusts to voice their dissatisfaction. The parenting network has also written directly to David Cameron urging him to review the current practice.

Bounty has responded to the campaign and defended their service. Clare Goodham, Bounty general manager, said: “We are disappointed that a commercial competitor, whose users we deeply respect and admire, has continued to attack our practices on maternity wards across the country. At Bounty, a mother’s wellbeing is our number one priority. This is why we welcome the idea of developing criteria for hospitals to ensure that their privacy and dignity are fully respected.”

“As a proud partner of the NHS for over 50 years, which sees over 2,000 new mums every day, we have worked in partnership with hospitals to provide free products and important health information to generations of new mothers.

“If anyone has any specific complaints or suggestions for improvement, then please let us know straight away at telluswhatyouthink@bounty.com.”

Tina Gibbs, volunteer for NCT Gloucester, added: “I think that in general everybody likes freebies but harvesting details from the mothers just after they’ve given birth is quite harsh.”

“I’m on the Gloucestershire Maternity Services Liaison Committee and we’ve been discussing the issue. “We think that rather than the representative coming into the room it would be better if they waited in the reception area.”

“This way mums could still have access to the freebies. I don’t think the freebies are wrong – some mothers really like them – but representatives need to be more clear about what they intend to do with mothers’ details.”

Three of the best . . . baby change bags

Storksak Bailey Bag
A lightweight canvas baby bag with leather detailing, two large external magnetic pockets, three elasticated compartments, internal pockets, a padded changing mat plus a food and bottle bag. From www.storksak.co.uk, £125.

CYBEX by Jeremy Scott Baby Bag
Featuring a fun ‘food fight’ print, this polyester changing bag by fashion designer Jeremy Scott includes a wipe-down changing mat, a wet compartment, bottle holder and an additional outside pocket. Available in major nursery stores, £95. www.cybex-online.com

Pink Lining Blooming Gorgeous Changing Bag
Vintage-inspired cotton canvas changing bag with an adjustable shoulder strap, two insulated bottle holders, two nappy pockets, a pen holder, key fob, mirror, phone pocket, small zip pocket, a padded changing mat and a wet zip bag. From www.johnlewis.com, £79.