**Appendix 3**

**A Parent’s Guide to Understanding Probiotics**

**Probiotics in preterm infants**

This leaflet provides information for the parents of babies born prematurely about the use of regular probiotic treatment.

**What is the medication called and what is it used for?**

Probiotics are harmless bacteria that live in our gut and help to keep our intestines healthy. Probiotics can stop harmful bacteria growing in the intestine and can help prevent conditions such as diarrhoea (gastroenteritis) and necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC)in which there is inflammation of the gut. There is good research evidence that probiotics protect babies, reducing NEC by 30%, and improving babies’ ability to tolerate milk feeds.

It is a treatment that contains the friendly bacteria that would usually be found in the intestine of breast-fed babies born at term. It is similar to drinking live yoghurt products. The bacteria are obtained by purifying a yoghurt type liquid so that your baby does not receive the milk part of the yoghurt.

LaBiNIC® is the most commonly used type of probiotic in neonatal units in UK. LaBiNIC® drops are completely free of dairy, soya, gluten and other allergens, and are suitable for vegans.

**How is it taken?**

LaBiNIC® is given with milk feeds.

**How often should it be taken?**

It is given every day, until your baby reaches 34 weeks corrected gestational age, or may be continued if there are difficulties with tolerating milk feeds.

**What are the benefits?**

Preterm babies frequently have unusual bacteria in their intestines, often as a result of other treatments we need to use, such as antibiotics. These unusual bacteria can increase the risks of serious diseases such as Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC), which is a severe inflammatory disease of the bowel. Many babies who get NEC recover fully, but it can sometimes be serious. Probiotics work by replacing these with normal bacteria, and by strengthening your baby’s immune response to infection.

**What are the side effects?**

Research has shown probiotics to be safe. There are no known risks or side effects to taking probiotics. The treatment may be temporarily stopped if your baby becomes unwell or feeds are stopped for any reason.

**What are the alternatives?**

There are no alternatives to probiotics; there is however a number of different brands of probiotics currently available in the UK.

**Who to contact if you have more questions?**

Please feel free to discuss this with the nurse caring for your baby or the consultant on duty, who will answer any queries you might have.