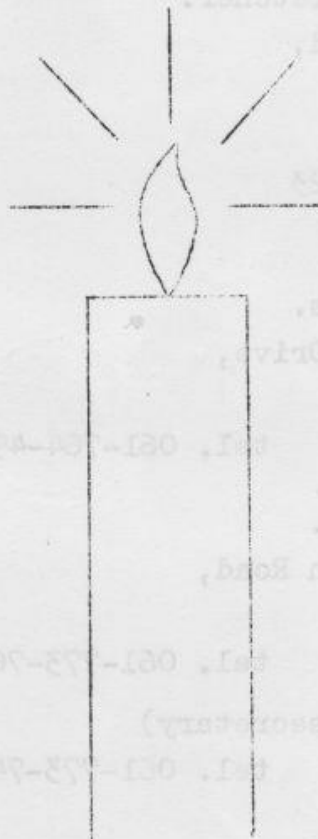


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ASSOCIATION FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE MATERNITY SERVICES

A.I.M.S.

Quarterly Newsletter *Sept. 1970*



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Editorial.

A.I.M.S. seems to be heading for an exciting time. The national questionnaire is going ahead, with a huge response, and it seems that the boom we have worked for and waited for may finally be on the way. Be prepared, by reading as widely as possible. Get your own ideas sorted out, in time to welcome new members.

There is a new Government, and new ideas. Look at the new ideas squarely, and consider the effect on your local maternity services. If I had paid for my hospital 'keep' when my first child was born, I might have complained about the food, as well as the treatment. As it was I swallowed the Spam and Mash a la NHS, without a word.

There are now even fewer women M.P.s, let's hope that the gentlemen use a bit of imagination when they organise our health service.

.....
A provincial mother's adventures in London.

I escape from domesticity for one day, leaving spouse, children, and a casserole. A slow crawl to Birmingham, and a swift train-journey to London. Shall I eat on the train at 11 a.m., or grab a hasty meal in London. Decisions, decisions! Arriving in London, I scuttle into the Underground, like a frightened rabbit. I watch the little maps, and wonder vaguely if I am going in the right direction. No scenery, so I watch the passengers. People look very sad - forlorn Asians and Africans, young girls like crushed and drooping flowers. Everyone looks very lonely, but better not speak in case they are spies, or junkies, or white-slavers - you never know, Aunt Agnes says. Into an Italian restaurant. I like them best, as the waiters seem to appreciate young matrons, and like to explain the menu - bliss! Out again into the busy street, which I must cross. There is no underpass, no zebra, no nothing. I look both ways ten times, and round all corners, before I launch myself into the traffic. Into the elegant building where the meeting is held. Is this really me - where's the pushchair, where's my bag, full of hankies and bits of biscuit? I remember, I relax - it's great!

Remark by a good husband and father,

'Oh, I think three children is enough. I just couldn't stand another pregnancy!

.....
No news is good news.

Lately, there has been a lively correspondence in the Guardian about mother-care in hospital for young child patients. The National Assocn. for the Welfare of Children in Hospital gets a terrific wave of publicity, this way. Most letters said that mothers had succeeded in staying with their sick child, by request and firm insistence. A few ward sisters had been antagonistic, but most seemed merely surprised at the request, and quite willing to co-operate.

The climate of opinion has changed, and it would appear that NAWCH should educate us to ask to stay with our sick children, and AIMS should educate couples to want to be together at a birth, and to ask. Flat refusals seem rare, it is more often a case of patients and their relatives being afraid to ask. Progressive hospitals have got around to inviting relatives to help, but the other hospitals may be more willing than we think. What we need are posters to put up in antenatal clinics. 'Why not ask Sister to arrange for your husband to be present when your child is born - you only have to ask'. Any other ideas?

.....
On the next page, we have pleasure in printing a letter from a new member of A.I.M.S., who is a nurse. I hope that we will approach the G.N.C. and C.M.B. to gain their views on conditions of service for midwives. It is very interesting to read 'Nursing Mirror' and the 'Midwives Chronicle', and indeed each AIMS group should get these periodicals and pass them around. It is such a relief to find that it is not a case of THEM and Us. Many nurses and midwives do admit that all is not well with the maternity services, and strive towards the ideal. To read the 'letters page' in the journals, is to be roused to pity for women working under poor conditions, and also under a very outdated hierarchical system, in which the opinions of the young are neither sought nor heard. Small wonder there is such wastage, in a profession that most girls aspire to at some time.

Letter from a State Registered Nurse - June '70

Dear Editor,

I am prompted to write to pinpoint the plight of midwives 'to be'. Does the general public realise just what is entailed, when a girl who has finished her general training of three years, and has perhaps spent two or three years more running wards or departments in a general hospital, decides to do her midwifery training? While undergoing her year's training, she has to go back to third year student nurses' pay. This perhaps could be endured, but what is even more daunting is that at the end of this year, if she decides to go back into general nursing, she has to start at the bottom of the general grades again. Thus, she is still being paid less than she was before she began her midwifery training. Is it any wonder, therefore, that many prospective midwives just don't think it worthwhile undertaking extra training at all? In industry, this would be deplored - would the Unions stand for it? Many potential midwives are lost this way.

Midwifery, to a nurse who has enjoyed her general training, is very alien. She has to adjust from nursing the sick, to mothers who only need help for a few hours or at the most a few days. Of course, once she undertakes midwifery, she finds she can derive just as much satisfaction in bringing new life into the world, as she can from nursing a cancer patient.

First and foremost, midwifery has to be made more attractive, both financially and prospect-wise. After all, it can prove an enjoyable and worthwhile career, and a British training is the best in the world. What can A.I.M.S. members do to improve the midwife's lot. Firstly, the General Nursing Council, and the Central Midwives Board could be approached and their views gained on this deplorable situation. If no satisfaction can be gained from these bodies, then the general public and our M.P.s should be informed. Create a public outcry! Surely, the babies of this country deserve more than to be brought into the world, by poorly paid, over-worked student midwives, who are resenting having ever left their fairly well-paid jobs in general nursing. Contented midwives working in well-staffed hospitals, make for contented mothers and babies.

News from Bury Group.

THE NATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

5,500 questionnaire forms have been printed, and the work has been publicised in the Telegraph, the Times, the Guardian, the Mirror, Mother and Baby, Mother, and various local Bury newspapers. Completed forms received have come from as far away as Japan, Libya, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Arabian Gulf, and Denmark (all of course, relating to births in the U.K. but this does show the interest, in that people from so far away would be bothered to fill in the questionnaire.

Mrs. Sheila Suthers, at whose home the survey is being undertaken, now has her mail delivered by Royal Mail van, as the local postman has refused to try to cope with so much post for just one house. Another difficulty has been the number of very small envelopes received, into which it is almost impossible to place one questionnaire, never mind the dozen or eighteen that some people have asked for - ALL in a small envelope.

The Group has spent many evenings just stapling, and folding up questionnaires, never mind the hours Mrs Suthers has spent just opening the post. On a good day, this can take up to two hours. Group members reckon that if they had been paid only one penny per hour they would be quite well off. Mr. Suthers is thinking of asking for expenses for his beer, as he has to keep going to the local pub, as the Group arrives and take over his house, two or three evenings a week, and he has to keep out of the way.

Some people have merely put a newspaper cutting in an envelope to ask for a questionnaire, but have not added their name and address. Others returning the completed questionnaire have asked for details of membership without putting their name and address on the questionnaire. This means a laborious search through the original letters just to see who Mrs X. from Anytown, Anycounty is!

The used stamps from the letters are being kept and sent off to Oxfam to help their funds.

A JUMBLE SALE was held on June 26th to raise local funds. Members visited Hope Hospital, Salford, known locally as the 'Salford Hilton' because it is so superb. Matron, Miss. Griffiths, was extremely pleasant and understanding. The following points are of interest:-

- a) There was a toilet in the Enema room, so that the patient can easily slip from the bed to the toilet, as soon as the enema has been given.
- b) Husbands are actively encouraged to the hospital, before the confinement, to see the place and attend small classes. Husbands are allowed at the birth, unless there is any complication.
- c) There was a general practitioner unit.
- d) The wards were either 2-bedded, 4-bedded or 6-bedded, and there are some single rooms.
- e) The antenatal ward chairs had arms, but the postnatal ward chairs were without arms to help mothers feeding babies.

Everything had been thought of, and members wished that all mothers and all staffs could have facilities like these.

.....
Early effects of the questionnaire.

Enquiries about starting new groups have been coming in from all parts, along with the completed questionnaires. Many more enquire about individual membership. Bury Group have produced a leaflet called 'NOTES FOR NEW GROUPS SETTING UP', and this will be available on request. The credit for this leaflet must go to Kathleen Ellis and Blanche Cornwell, who wrote it, and to Bury Group in general for having it run off.

In the Midlands, there have been enquirers over a large area. As members will be so scattered, Margaret Bradley hopes to form a Birmingham Area Group, for mutual encouragement. She is trying to hire a room in Birmingham, and a film on a maternity topic, although the expense involved will probably prevent frequent meetings.

There have been enquiries from London mothers, and it is hoped that we will find a local Group in the capital city.

.....
 Annual subscription is now 10/- minimum, of which 2/6d may be retained by the local Group. If your sub. is due, please forward it to Col. Fletcher, 37A Queens Road, Kingston, Surrey.

COPY

Birchcroft,
Smugglers Way,
The Sands,
Farnham,
Surrey.

31st May 1970

The Secretary of State for Social Services,
Department of Health and Social Security,
Alexander Fleming House,
LONDON S.E.1.

Dear Sir,

This Association would like to submit the enclosed comments and suggestions on the future structure of the National Health Service in matters relating to the Maternity Services.

I enclose for your perusal a questionnaire which has been circulated not only to our membership but any mother requesting a copy. Nearly 3,000 requests for the questionnaire have been received from all over the country. We hope that the analysis will provide useful information from a "consumer group" as we were once termed at the Ministry.

Yours sincerely,

Chairman.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

1. This Association applauds the proposed integration of the three sections of the N.H.S. The lack of co-ordination and liaison between the three sections has in the past contributed to the unsatisfactory management of maternity cases.
2. This Association sincerely hopes that in re-organising the N.H.S., the levelling of quality of service in the maternity field will be achieved as anticipated. The variable standard of maternity care over the country has been of concern to this Association during the eleven years of its existence.
3. We would continue to urge the recruitment of midwives as we believe that the shortage of midwives is still the cause of women being left alone in labour and generally not receiving the care and attention they require. A few overworked midwives can but perpetuate poor human relations.
4. If, as it seems, 48 hours discharge has come to stay, mothers need more support at home. We strongly urge the formation of some form of maternity aid (as in Holland) at home. The present home help service is inadequate, not suited to the needs of the maternity case and is frequently not available.
5. In hospital the maternity aid could receive her training and at the same time undertake the many unskilled jobs carried out at present by paid auxiliaries and voluntary workers.
6. As an Association with an active Voluntary Sitters Scheme, we welcome the proposed support of such voluntary organisations. We agree that voluntary workers contribute considerably to the work of the N.H.S., but they are often spurned, their activities restricted and are very scarce. In view of the increasing numbers of working wives and the general attitude to voluntary work we will feel a little dubious about the source of future voluntary workers.
7. In view of the need of large sums of money to build urgently needed hospitals, to remunerate staff, to provide and pay for research, this Association feels that the Government should reconsider some form of state lottery as there seems no other means of obtaining the amount of money required.

The following article is reprinted by kind permission of the Guardian, in which paper it appeared on 20th July 1970.

CHARITY, SWEET AND SOUR

by Ann Shearer

Volunteers are cheap, which is one good reason for the Government to have latched on to them to help bale out the welfare services. They can also be a lot more sympathetic than many statutory services, which is a better one. But before we all sign up to help the mentally sick and handicapped, the elderly and even the people in general hospitals - as Sir Keith Joseph suggested last week - let's be clear that we are no substitute for Government action and that we reserve the right to make sure it happens.

The trouble with charity, whether formal or informal, is that it tends to be conservative. The good ladies may have traded the chicken broth for meals on wheels, but the dangers of their actions are the same. As long as they're around to patch up the gaps in State provisions, the gap will tend to stay, and the good ladies will go on patching them up. This doesn't make voluntary action unnecessary - no Government can ensure kindness and friendship - but it does mean that it's no substitute for properly worked out services.

For instance, the Conservatives earlier this year produced a pamphlet on helping the elderly. It discussed at length the need to preserve dignity and independence in old age, which is quite right. But one of the main weapons was to be a massive increase in voluntary help. There was no consideration that the best way to preserve anyone's dignity is to give them enough to live on - the need to bring pensions above the level of supplementary benefits was never once mentioned. A hot meal brought in by a friendly volunteer may be nice, but many might prefer after all, the dignity and independence of being able to buy a decent hot meal for themselves and even being able to offer one to the volunteer.

But then, charity tends to be against independence. Self-help got hived off into trade unions, and it is only just beginning to re-emerge now that the political movement it sunk itself in has turned out to be too like them after all. So charity remains the basically paternalistic affair it has always been. With a few shining exceptions, the people

who have time, money, and the inclination to sit on enough committees to make policy still tend to be the descendants of the chicken broth brigade, less inclined to think in terms of social change than making sure the present system doesn't cause hardship.

As if this wasn't enough, the courts have made sure that charity can't be a force for change at all. Case law was never noted for putting our ideas forward, and case law decided what charities can do. To judge by the Charity Commissioners' latest warning against political activities, a charity is only charitable if it is ineffective. The alleviation of distress has now become so inseparable from state activity, though, that political lobbying must surely be an essential part of any charity's work. We've only recently, for instance, become aware of the conditions in many long-stay hospitals, yet these conditions or worse, have existed over the past twenty years.

The Government has already of course gone some way towards forestalling the critics. If you don't like the long-stay hospitals, volunteer to work in them. If you are worried about the financial state of the NHS, perhaps, the collecting box is at the door as you go out. This sort of thing can clearly be extended; if you don't like housing policy start an association. If you don't like the way we administer social security, start a clothing fund.

Of course, there's room for all of these - even the last, to our shame - but the dangers of simply helping to perpetuate the inadequate system are still there, and the right to criticise must still be established.

.....
Minutes of the Council Meeting, held at the Oxford and Cambridge University Club, 71 Pall Mall, London S.W.1. on Saturday 6th June 1970.

Present :- Dr.P. Fox-Russell (Chairman)
Lt. Col.Fletcher (Treasurer)
Mrs. S. Cooper - Bedford Group
Mrs. S. Suthers - Bury Group
Mrs. K. Ellis - Bury Group.

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. Bradley and Mrs. Willington. The minutes of the January Council were, read approved and signed.

The national questionnaire - Mrs. Suthers described the publicity given by the Guardian, the Times, and the Telegraph. Enquiries about results have come from Good Housekeeping, Pulse, and a Scottish journalist. About 2,600 requests for questionnaires have been received, via the newspapers. The cost of coding and analysis would be between £60 and £100, and AIMS is trying to get help with this.

The letter to the Ministry has been acknowledged and is reprinted elsewhere in the newsletter.

Bedford Group publicity - poor response to excellent newspaper article, but Mrs. Cooper believes that a new group will be started in Luton, and one in Manchester. Mrs. Cooper received an estimate of £15 for having printed 1000 AIMS birth announcement cards. Col. Fletcher will try for a cheaper estimate.

Bury Group publicity - a car sticker has been designed and could be produced for 6d. each, by a grateful father. The AIMS Stand at the Bury Exhibition was a great success, and brought new members.

Bury Group has also produced a leaflet called Suggestions for starting a Group, because they find that new members are interested in forming new groups.

It was agreed that the Minutes should be summarised for insertion in the newsletter.

The Treasurer reported that we have 100 paid-up members, and £31 balance. A friend of Mrs. Ellis is to try to form a London Group from the 19 women who were interested in AIMS.

Minimum age for membership was set at 18, in answer to a query from secondary schoolchildren.

The date for the next meeting will be September 26th, 2 p.m. at the FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE (ROOM 3) ST. MARTINS LANE, LONDON, unless cancelled.

A.I.M.S. has received publicity in the medical press, as a result of which it is hoped that members' views will be expressed in a B.B.C. Television documentary film to be shown in December - watch out for this. If you can read a copy of a summary of the Ministry of Health & Social Security report of the Sub Committee entitled "DOMICILIARY MIDWIFERY & MATERNITY BED NEEDS" - your comments and observations are invited.