

NEWSLETTER 3

December 1960.

Dear Member,

The number of members is now between 600 and 700. Contributions from kind well wishers have so far just kept pace with the cost of paper, printing, envelopes and stamps. A large anonymous donation from Yorkshire has enabled me to employ a typist for four hours a week and to put some money towards a research project which Lieut. Colonel Fletcher hopes to organise on behalf of A.I.M.S. Further projects and duplicated writings will depend entirely on the money which members can raise.

Members come from almost every district of the British Isles ( there are even a few from overseas - someone is "watching" an E.African newspaper for us ! ). Members include consultants, surgeons, obstetricians, doctors, psychiatrists, physiologists, dentists, psychologists, schoolteachers ( a large number of these ), midwives, nurses, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, physiotherapists, journalists, civil servants, librarians, biochemists, sociologists, artists, designers, welfare workers and an optician, and I doubt if all these people are being led blindly by me - they know that there is something wrong at the heart of our maternity services.

Anyone who cares to read our literature will see that we want to draw public attention and interest to the wide variation in standards that exists between one maternity hospital and another ( we would like to see them all brought to the high standard of the best ). We hope to do this by talking and writing and collecting information and facts in the form of signed accounts of experiences and questionnaires. We are forming ourselves into areas under regional organisers to keep vigil. We ask anyone who feels that they have been treated badly to contact their nearest A.I.M.S. Regional Organiser immediately. Many people have felt that there is much which is unsatisfactory in our maternity services. We want proof. We ask for details of good as well as bad services, because people should know which is which. Money is needed for replacing all kinds and shapes of out-of-date hospitals ( what about the plight of many old people wearing out the end of their lives in a general hospital ward ? ) The increasing shortage of nurses and midwives needs investigating before more hospitals close their doors ( now doors, too, sometimes ) through lack of staff. More money under the Welfare State means more government money, more money from the taxpayers. Are we or are we not prepared to pay for a proper Health Service ? Have we the energy to organise it properly ? Are we prepared to take the treatment we deserve if we fail to take an interest in our hospitals ? People today are apathetic about almost everything - except perhaps about cruelty to dogs, and statistics, facts and figures and stories of human misery wash over them unheeded. But is it too much to ask some of the medical profession to drink a pint of human kindness ?

A letter to the Nursing Times in July said "The formation by lay women of an Association to provide Improvements in the Maternity Services is an indictment of nursing care which has so far remained undefended by the profession". Someone the other day asked why I was bothering with A.I.M.S. when "one hears so much about the subject these days in the press and on the radio" - and she looked suitably surprised when I said that I was pleased to hear we are being so effective.

200 Questionnaires have been filled in and returned to me. Complaints fall into three main categories - conduct of the labour and delivery, ante natal care and post natal lack of care in hospital wards. I am worried by the number of people who put "very depressed after the birth" and remarked that this often continued for a long time afterwards - this, I am sure, was never "Nature's" intention - it is wasteful and unhelpful and is usually the result of bad conduct of a confinement. Where a mother has had experience of both good maternity care and bad for successive babies this post-natal depression is of no consequence after the good treatment. To the question "Would you willingly return to the same hospital if you had to ?" the majority have written "No", and say that they were not treated as an intelligent human being. In most cases where a mother did not like to be left alone during labour ( especially for a first baby ) her husband would have stayed with her if he could. ( I would be glad to know of any further instances where a husband has insisted on staying with his wife in hospital until after their baby was born. ) Inadequate analgesia is another major complaint.

The Duchess of Kent opening the Nursing Conference in London in October spoke of the need for "more voluntary helpers in hospitals". Mrs. Campbell, A.I.M.S. Regional Organiser in Purley is trying to compile a list of voluntary "sitters in " in response to the suggestion by a local hospital consultant that she should "do something", and then ask for the co-operation of the matron and Hospital Management Committee. If the principal of voluntary helpers becomes established here, other R.O's will perhaps find it easier to follow suit.

Mrs. Woolcock at Harrow has held some successful coffee mornings, has written in her local paper, and has had posters printed that will be displayed in the windows of baby-wear shops where the interested enquirer will be given Mrs. Woolcock's name and address. This R.O. charges her local members 5/-d subscription, and she is preparing a questionnaire to find out about conditions in local hospitals.

Mrs. Cook in Ponzance says she is sure that she is the only R.O. to have her letters delivered to her by a Horse-riding postman. She has three very small children, a house in the middle of being converted and a bus once a week. Nevertheless Mrs. Cook is active. Her letters have appeared in the Sunday Times and The Guardian, and she has obtained the backing of the M.P. for St. Ives, who will give her all the help he can in arranging a public meeting in Truro in January.

Mrs. Hill in Leicester is holding small group meetings for discussion with Dr. Kidd.

Mrs. Norris in Northumberland keeps sending me the names of new members and she has held a public meeting at which Dr. Deighton was the speaker. I am told it created quite a stir. The mens section of A.I.M.S. in Cullercoats did a good drawing of things as they see it, which I am unfortunately unable to reproduce here - but the mother in the picture was done up like an Egyptian Mummy with her head in a sound proof box, her protruding hand was held by a loving husband who was watching television.

A cutting from the Daily Express for Friday September 23rd reads:-

"YOUNG WIFE gave birth to a child at Arcata, California, while chained to her husband.

The man, 23-year-old student of English literature John Quinn, told the hospital authorities: "I love my wife. It is my moral right to be with her."

When the doctors refused, he chained himself and his brunette wife together by the wrists.

Two padlocks secured the chain-and by the time the police arrived it was all over. "

Mother and son are both doing well.

Mrs. Maughfling in Hereford plans a public meeting soon. She would like to see domiciliary midwives linked by radio in country districts.

Mrs. Richman in Bristol has been busy for A.I.M.S. although she is mother of 5. She has both broadcast and been on Western Region Television. The television programme did not bring about the response she had hoped for because the timing of the item was so restricted that she was not given time to state our case clearly.

Mrs. White and her husband of Southport sit up until all hours writing letters on behalf of A.I.M.S. Members may have seen a splendid letter from there in the Telegraph.

Mrs. Griggs of Ashford Kent, held a small but useful public meeting with the M.P. for Ashford in the chair. Colonel Fletcher was the speaker and lively discussion followed when it became evident that a posse of midwives was present. Mrs. Griggs - a retired midwife herself, with three children, has acted as assistant-midwife and -friend-to-the-mother when she has been asked to do so in Ashford. She hopes to hold further meetings and to get speakers and show films - both of these items appear to be in short supply.

Mrs. Hastings, Mrs. Taylor, and Mrs. Clarke are getting together in Essex. Mrs. Taylor has been taking part in the correspondence in the Nursing Times that arose out of an article on midwifery by Claire Rayner. She (Mrs. Taylor) feels strongly that slapping in midwifery is unnecessary and that it should be banned. ( It is used sometimes to deal with a "hysterical patient").

The more sensational Sunday Newspapers have reported and misreported bits and pieces of information about A.I.M.S. Local newspapers have mentioned A.I.M.S. So have Magazines ( including the "Housewife" for February 1961).

"Almost half the women who died in childbirth in England and Wales during the years 1955-57 need never have lost their lives. That is the frightening conclusion of a confidential inquiry on behalf of the Ministry of Health, details of which were published last week. If, during these years, more than 400 women died unnecessarily, how many more were put in danger through the same negligence and mismanagement and how many of these suffered permanent loss of health and disability? If avoidable loss of life occurs in the conduct of midwifery, how sure can we be that it is not common in other branches of medicine ?

These deaths resulted from incompetence and inexperience both inside and outside the hospitals. The conclusion to be drawn is that the public is entitled to a permanent system of inspection of the quality of medical care. The practice of holding confidential inquiries into deaths in midwifery, which has been going on for some years, should be extended to other branches of medicine. More good could be done and more lives saved by raising the standards of existing medical practice than by many of the discoveries we are always waiting for. It is time a proper research arm was created within our National Health Service in order to find out what is really going on. " This was written in The Observer on July 17th.

The News Chronicle printed the following:-

"The Minister of Health, Mr.Derok Walker-Smith answered MPs yesterday who criticised the neglect of mothers in childbirth.

He was challenged in the Commons on a report by his Ministry suggesting that nearly half the mothers in Britain who died in childbirth every year could have lived.

Figures from the report were quoted by Mr.Kenneth Robinson (Lab.St.Pancras North), who asked how the Minister intended to protect the lives of these women.

Mr.Walker-Smith replied: "I do not think that these figures carry quite the implication you suggest." The report contained ample evidence that a considerable improvement had taken place.

Dr.Edith Summerskill (Lab.Warrington) protested that the Minister was treating the matter too lightly. "The report specifically states that domiciliary midwifery and midwifery in hospitals can be severely criticised", she said.

Mr.Walker-Smith told the House that in the present decade maternity mortality had been reduced by more than half."

Mr.Walker-Smith has been replaced by Mr.Enoch Powell - let us hope he is not going to try to manage on less money and that he is a sympathetic listener.

The Times for the 13th October quoted the senior obstetrical and gynaecological surgeon, Kingston Hospital Surrey, as saying:-

"We must look upon our mothers going into the maternity units as if they were going into a friend's house. Let them have visitors, and if mothers cannot be kept in hospital and looked after properly for at least 10 to 14 days, then for goodness sake arrange for them to have their babies at home under proper care".

1,400 more midwives are needed - 1000 in the hospitals and 400 in the domiciliary service. 3,000 women qualify each year but only about 800 of them are practising three years later. The shortage of midwives has caused 1,000 beds to be closed.

Married midwives whose children have grown up must be made to feel that it is an attractive proposition to return to their professional work if only on a part-time basis.

By November last year there were six new hospitals partly finished and in use, nine hospitals on which work was in progress, and four more were scheduled to be begun in the financial year 1960-61. This is in addition to the numerous improvement and extension projects

CAPITAL SPENDING ON HOSPITALS is as follows:-

1961-62	£m.
1960-61	25.5
1959-60	22
1958-59	20
1957-58	17.2
1956-57	12.4
1955-56	10

It has been estimated that the necessary amount of money should be £75m. The figure mentioned at the time of the general election was £50m.

The B.B.C. Network Three on Monday evenings at 6.30 are to do some programmes on the Maternity Services in January. They appealed for the views of mothers who had had a baby during the last six months.

A Professor of Obstetrics gave a talk on Women's Hour in September. This was followed by a discussion programme arising out of the correspondence in connection with the first talk. The Professor appeared in "Family Affairs" on B.B.C. television in October with Claire Rayner and Miss Audrey Wood the Secretary of the Royal College of Midwives.

Dr.T.Deighton has spent six weeks visiting Regional Organisers all over Britain. He had considerable trouble with the British Railway system, but all members he visited have assured me that his journey was really necessary, and how much they appreciated seeing a "link" who had seen others who are as interested as themselves in trying to get improved standards in Maternity care. Dr.Deighton is seventy and he spent energy and money on this formidable tour. I am sure members would want me to thank him and to say here again how much his Regional Rides were appreciated.

Lt.Col.W.J.Fletcher has been visiting R.O s in London and the South East. Meeting people is obviously valuable. There will be a good opportunity for some of us ( who can "get away") to meet each other at the next London Meeting which is to be on Saturday January 7th 1961 in the Recital Room of the Royal Festival Hall London from 2.30 p.m. until 5.30.p.m. Tea and biscuits will be available. I hope to have three speakers. Details of the meeting should reach you with this newsletter. Admission will be by ticket only. Tickets may be had from Mrs.H.Rutt, 109, Highfield Lane, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. (not from me) in exchange for a stamped self-addressed envelope. A collection (about 2/6d per head) will be taken up at the meeting to cover the cost of hiring the hall. I do hope as many members ( and their husbands/wives and friends) as possible will come. Are there any London Members who would find a visiting member a bed for the night if necessary?

I spent an interesting afternoon at University College Hospital Obstetrical Unit where Dr.Sheila Ransom very kindly showed me round and told me of her criticisms of A.I.M.S. and its methods. The ante natal classes at this hospital are well known to be excellent. The first stage room is fairly pleasant but the lying-in wards are big and "institutional" and there are too few single rooms - In spite of the old buildings most mothers seem well satisfied to have been delivered at U.C.H.

REGIONAL ORGANISERS. Please try to make your whereabouts known in your own neighbourhoods so that any mother who feels she has had bad treatment may find you easily and tell you about it. You should write the details of the complaint down. The mother should usually be advised to send her complaint to the Chairman of the Hospital Management Committee, or, if she has not the time, you could do it for her. In obviously doubtful cases or where a case is particularly interesting, please let me know about it. Try to hold meetings - no matter how small. Talking is important, it forms public opinion. Discussion is constructive, it formulates ideas.

Please keep a list of your local members. Meet your next nearest fellow R.O. if possible. Collect money if you can. Keep some of it ( and an account of it ) for postage and expenses in your own area and send me a contribution for paper and bulk postage when available. Unnecessary suffering of all kinds in childbirth must go. The very uneven standards of maternity care all over Britain should be noted and a general raising of standards urged. Collect information and encourage those with complaints to complain - (reprisals on a mother returning to the same hospital are unlikely).

Are there any members with special interests in the following:- the N.S.P.C.C., The Family Planning Association; the Marriage Guidance Council; Unmarried Mothers; the Abortion Law; the Suicide Law? Tape recorders - these might be useful for meetings.

Please on January 1st make a resolution to write a letter or do something else to help A.I.M.S. on the first day of every month in 1961. Make New Years Day "A" Day and write a letter to your M.P. Already we are being noticed - keep it up.

One day all maternity centres may be places of "comfort and joy". If you light a candle on Christmas Eve, light one for A.I.M.S. too - for all the human beings to be born next year.

Yours Sincerely,

Sonia Willington.

Can anyone read one of the following publications for us regularly ? ( if so, please tell Mrs.G.Burrell, 68, Westwood Hill, Sydenham, London.S.E.26 - she is A.I.M.S Press Organiser).

Medical Digest Monthly .....	3/-d
Midwives Chronicle Monthly .....	8d
Mother and Baby Monthly .....	9d
(Controlled circulation)	
Mother and Child Monthly .....	2/-d
Nursery Jnl. Monthly .....	6d
Nursing Mirror Weekly .....	8d
(Mrs.Taylor reads these occasionally)	
Nursing Times Weekly .....	6d
Wife and Home Monthly .....	1/3d
Woman's Day Weekly .....	5d
Better Health Monthly .....	4d
District Nursing. Monthly .....	1/-d
Good Health (?). Monthly .....	4d
Home (?) Monthly .....	1/9d
Home & Country (?) Monthly .....	4d
Home & Family (?) Qutly .....	3d
Hospital Equipment News (Controlled Circulation) Monthly .....	6d
House & Garden. Monthly .....	3/-d
Ideal Home . Monthly .....	2/3d
Journal of Obstetrics. Monthly .....	12/6d

Mrs.Claire Rayner of 7, Pasture Rd., North Wembley Middx (Arnold 5050) writes:-

"I would be most grateful if any of the members of A.I.M.S. would send me any comments, both good and bad, on the Maternity Services, to help me with a book I have been asked to write on the subject, by Messrs George Allen and Unwin. The aspects of the services I would be most interested in are; Ante natal care; management of labour, loneliness in labour; and midwives' approach to the business of feeding; all these in both the hospital and the domiciliary services. I would also be interested in members' views on fertility clinics and Family planning clinics.

Any help I may receive I will, of course, acknowledge, and I will also assure members that I will never quote any of their names in print.