AIMS For a better birth...

In Memoriam: Beverley Lawrence Beech

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A personal reflection ***by Debbie Chippington Derrick***

Beverley's sudden illness and death has come as a severe shock to all who knew her. With just a few days to go to the publication of the March AIMS Journal we only had time to include this brief personal reflection about someone who was so significant in the history of AIMS and the wider maternity services improvement community. We plan to publish a full obituary in our June issue, and will also be putting together a memory book to share with her family. If you have a memory or tribute that you would like to share, please send it to enquiries@aims.org.uk

It was the births of her sons David and Alan which started Beverley on her journey to her most amazing career as an advocate for women, much of that working within AIMS, an organisation which she chaired for forty years. Her brave and clear voice about what was wrong, and what was unacceptable gave many others the confidence to speak out. The number of families who are grateful to her for this is immense, with many many more benefitting from her work without being aware of what she did for them.

In addition, her influence on those working in the maternity services should not be underestimated. Through in-depth discussions, speeches and writing she helped many health care staff to see things differently and to realise that they personally had a role in making improvements. She also provided

support to health care professionals who were standing up for women and families. The two most prominent cases she was involved in were those of Wendy Savage and Becky Reed and the Albany practice.

Many people will have memories of how Beverley supported them personally, by helping them to be able to make informed decisions about their own birth, or to make a complaint about the care that they had received. Her influence was certainly there for me when I decided to have my fourth baby at home after three previous caesareans. For others, she helped them develop the support work they were doing. I have often heard her speak about starfish and rescuing them one at a time - each one rescued was important, even though you couldn't rescue them all.

Many will also be able to look back on shared conversations, drinks, lunches, journeys or even hotel rooms (keeping down AIMS costs), or just the impact of reading her words.

I was lucky enough to be able to work closely with Beverley for over a decade at AIMS, but also to have been a friend. She spent time with my family, and my husband spent many an hour sitting in her basement office in Surbiton sorting various issues with her computer. We were honoured to have been able to attend her 70th Birthday and I have lots of memories of happy times spent with her. I remember fondly a European Network of Childbirth Associations (ENCA) meeting in Paris, where we hired bikes and cycled to the Eiffel tower and lay on the grass in the evening sun.

She had only moved from Surbiton at the beginning of December 2022, to a house right next to her sailing club in Hammersmith. She had so much more to live for, and our thoughts are with the family and friends who have been deprived of this time with her.

Her speech at the AIMS 50th event which was held at her sailing club gives highlights of her work over several decades

https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/50-years-campaigning

If you haven't read her articles, the following examples from the AIMS Journal should give you a flavour:

Challenging the Medicalisation of Birth

https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/challenging-the-medicalisation-of-birth

Violence in obstetrics

https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/violence-in-obstetrics

Pressing for Change

https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/pressing-for-change

She was an inspiration to a generation of birth activists and never lost her passion for improving the maternity services. Her challenging and compassionate voice will be missed, and those like me who had

the privilege of working with her will miss her insightfulness and sharp wit.

Author Bio: Debbie has been an AIMS Member for 35 years and an AIMS Volunteer for 18 years. She was previously Vice Chair of AIMS and Chair of Trustees, and is now a current AIMS Trustee and member of the AIMS Management Team.