AIMS For a better birth...

Continuity Matters - Women's Voices

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By The AIMS Campaigns Team

The Continuity of Midwifery Carer model of maternity care is being rolled out in Northern Ireland, and is now in its second year. Every trust has a dedicated Continuity Lead Midwife, with at least one continuity team in each trust. There was a trial team set up in one of the trusts in August 2020 thatwe wrote about at the time. Now we hear from one mother who benefited from this model of care:

> "I opted into the care of the Lotus continuity of carer team at 8 months pregnant, when the trial of this service commenced in Northern Health and Social Care Trust. With the support of my doula, I had looked into various options for where to birth my baby and felt that doing so under the care of the Lotus team would be best for me.
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> From the day I opted into the Lotus team's care, one primary midwife was with me for all appointments and the birth of my baby. Even though I was quite far along in my pregnancy, this enabled me to quickly develop a strong, trusting relationship with one healthcare provider.
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> My partner and I were also able to meet with my midwife and doula on several occasions to discuss our birth preferences, concerns, etc. It was fantastic to have the support of both a doula and midwife as they brought different but complementary skills. My midwife and doula were both fantastic throughout my pregnancy, birth and postnatal experience; I felt they worked really well together, communicating throughout to help ensure I got the best support possible.
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> Throughout my care, I felt I was the primary decision maker as I was able to fully discuss my choices and preferences with people who were very respectful of these, offering me helpful advice and information as appropriate. This really helped develop a relationship based on trust and respect.
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> During labour my midwife ensured my partner and I were fully informed about potential procedures and their risks/benefits. This helped me feel in control at an extremely vulnerable time. Other staff from the Lotus team also provided support postnatally as I had one overnight stay in hospital.
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> Overall, I would highly recommend the continuity of carer model. I think it leads to safer,

> more woman centred care that helps empower parents. I think it is a fantastic service that should be the norm for all maternity care. I would also highly recommend birthing people invest in the support of a doula. I have heard it said that the best birth team is comprised of a supportive midwife, doula, partner and birthing person. Having experienced this first hand I can vouch that it is true!" *Bevin*

AIMS extends a big thank you to Bevin for sharing her experience. We hope that it will encourage others, including healthcare professionals and anyone who has experienced continuity of carer, to document their experience, so we can raise their voice too. We need to raise our voices, as we continue to campaign for the implementation of Continuity of Carer for all. Please get in touch with your experiences, stories and reflections via campaigns@aims.org.uk.