AIMS For a better birth...

AIMS is concerned about the accessibility of CQC local maternity service ratings: should you be too?

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By the AIMS Campaigns Team

Women have a choice about which local maternity service they want to support them through their pregnancy, birth and postnatal period. One quality indicator that many women consider important is a service's CQC rating. AIMS has evidence, however, to suggest that CQC ratings for local maternity services aren't always easily accessible when women are doing their research to help make that choice. We call on all birth activists to help their local community - and improve national practice - by investigating the accessibility of this information in your area, sharing good practice and letting us know if you have any further concerns about the accessibility of local trust data.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care in England. Following some high-profile local maternity reviews that highlighted worrying shortcomings, and because inspections are generally infrequent, the CQC is currently carrying out amaternity inspection programme. This should ensure that every local maternity service receives more regular external scrutiny and feedback, and that CQC maternity ratings are as up-to-date as possible. After each inspection of a local maternity service, the CQC updates or confirms its rating of various aspects of the service then produces a publicly accessible report. Few local service users are regular readers of the CQC website, or are signed up to its notification service, or follow the CQC's busy social media channels. While local press seem to do a good job in picking up on new inspection reports, this information is not easily accessible in retrospect and may not reach a wide audience.

AIMS is keen to ensure that these ratings and reports are not 'hidden in plain sight'. They need to be easily accessible to local citizens, in places they'd expect to find them. But we've been finding out that this is not always the case:

- We have been given an example of a local trust where members of its Maternity Voice Partnership (MVP) were not notified that a CQC maternity inspection report had been published until they were being briefed, months later, on the trust's action plan in response to the CQC report (an action plan which had clearly been drawn up with no reference to the MVP and without MVP input).
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We have noticed that not all trusts are sharing information about CQC maternity inspection outcomes on their websites. For example, trust maternity pages might have a 'CQC Good' footer on their maternity pages (a rating related to the entire trust) whereas the maternity services are currently rated 'requires improvement', both overall and for both safety and leadership. Whilst this may be compliant with CQC guidance, it is misleading for service users specifically interested in the maternity services.

- We have found an NHS Local Maternity System endorsed website that purports to offer information to service users about their local maternity units, to enable choice. But this website doesn't include all relevant CQC maternity ratings and instead includes information that seems to conflict with the latest CQC inspection outcomes.

So our question is this: are these localised problems or systemic behaviour that is more widespread?

We hope that by investigating this in your local area you can be reassured that this CQC information is reaching local service users, and take action if not. We are also keen to hear about examples of good practice:

- Perhaps your local maternity service does an excellent job in reporting their latest CQC inspection outcomes - including to their MVP - even when the rating is not as positive as they'd hoped?
- Maybe you have examples of how your local trust encourages reflection on the published CQC report from all local stakeholders?
- We're particularly interested in positive examples of how trusts involve local stakeholders in producing the local response to the CQC inspection report, and in seeing some particularly impressive responses to the CQC challenge.
- Very importantly, we are keen to hear how local trusts ensure that information about latest inspection findings is accessible, and how they ensure all existing material (on websites/ leaflets etc) is updated promptly with the latest CQC report.

Please join AIMS in helping to ensure that taxpayer-funded and resource-intensive maternity service regulation is accessible to all service users and is making a positive difference.

P.S. This birth activist briefing is focussed on CQC inspection reports, but we would also be interested to hear if you have been working on other problems around the accessibility of trust maternity

information/data, as we'd love to share your work. Thank you.