AIMS For a better birth...

AIMS attends the NHS Confed Expo 2024

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By Jo Dagustun

In this piece, one of our Campaigns Team volunteers illustrates how attending conferences such as the NHS Confed Expo helps to underpin the quality of our AIMS campaigns work

As an AIMS volunteer, and member of NHS England's Maternity and Neonatal Stakeholder Council, I love stepping beyond the realms of maternity to better understand the context in which we work; this always helps me better understand the potential for improving maternity services, the enablers and the barriers. That's why I registered for the NHS Confed Expo earlier this year. The organisers are the NHS Confederation, "… the membership organisation that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland …". The target audience for this conference series is perhaps 'health and care leaders and their teams', but there was quite a mix of delegates and everyone with an interest is welcome.

Very conveniently for me, the conference was taking place in Manchester, and was free to attend, so easy to access and costing just my pro bono time plus train fare (of just £7.80 charged to AIMS). I'm absolutely sure that we got good value for this outlay! Registering was straightforward, and the conference app - available in advance - was really good to use, and helped me understand the shape of the conference, what was happening where and when, and who would be there. Looking at the app, I was reassured that each of the sessions would be dedicated to improving care for patients and the public.

Due to diary commitments, I attended the first day of the conference online. It was brilliant. Not only did

online viewers have a premium view of the main stage, we were also treated to backstage interviews with some of the day's key speakers, including Victor Adebowale (chair of NHS Confederation), Richard Meddings (chair of NHS England), William Atkinson (former headteacher and leadership consultant), Amanda Pritchard (CEO of NHS England) and Matthew Taylor (CEO at the NHS Confederation). I was particularly pleased that the livestream included some recorded presentations, taking place elsewhere on the conference floor, including the session I'd really been wanting to attend - In conversation with Tinuke Awe and Clothilde Rebecca Abe, co-founders of 5 x More. It really was my lucky day.

Day two, I attended in person. There were a few sessions that I planned to attend. But first, the exhibition hall. This was a hugely evocative space: the site of the COVID 19 Nightingale Hospital. I started to get my bearings and took a wander around the stands, and soon got into my stride, learning loads as I chatted to exhibitors. These included the Care Quality Commission, The Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute (THIS Institute), the Alliance Manchester Business School, AstraZeneca UK, the Healthcare Financial Management Association, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Managers in Partnership, Net Zero NHS, NHS Blood and Transport, NHS England, NHS Property Services, and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (the NMC).

There was one person that I had really wanted to meet that day - Sonah Paton, a fellow member of Stakeholder Council and co-founder and managing director of Bristol-based Black Mothers Matter. It was so good to have an unhurried first chat with Sonah after she'd completed her session.

At another stand (belonging to CAHN - the Manchester-based Caribbean and African Health Network), I was explaining that I really appreciated the work of this charity, and that I really ought to connect with their Chair, but that I was a bit nervous of doing so. You can maybe guess who then walked up, the Chair herself, Faye Ruddock ... I took a breath and a wonderful conversation followed (mainly focused on our shared interest in the CORE 20+5 initiative and the Enhanced Midwifery Continuity of Carer model of care). This underlined to me the benefits of attending such events in person, and finding the courage to speak up.

I learnt about so many new organisations and issues that day - all important to a well-functioning maternity service. I gained insight into the panel of lawyers engaged by NHS Resolution, and started to imagine a bespoke maternity training programme for them ;-)

At only a few stands was I met with people who clearly had a script to follow, presumably without the autonomy to divert from that and talk to what visitors to the stand were interested in; I moved on quickly.

And then, and it was now three o'clock and I hadn't yet made a session, I made my way to the main stage. En route, however, I saw a huddle of maternity people I recognised in a side room, and joined that session instead. And what a great session it was: Working with women and families to improve equity in maternity and neonatal care. Quite unplanned, I even found myself asking a question (about CORE 20+5 and continuity of carer) at the end of the session. I got a really positive response that led to some very good brief chats with some of the speakers and others attending the session, all the way to the exit at the

end of the day, as well as a follow up email (to which I haven't yet had a proper response, but I'll keep chasing!)

I couldn't have planned a better day, and that's without mentioning the short exchange with the Chair of the NHS Confederation, Victor Adebowale, and a question posed to the Chair of NHS England, Richard Meddings via the app. (Not that I ever got a response to the latter, mind you ...)

The key themes I returned to throughout the Expo were: good governance, transparency and equity, with a particular focus on progress with the maternity element of theCORE20+5 initiative (and in particular where we are with the implementation of enhanced midwifery continuity of care teams). It was a real treat to find others with similar interests, to listen, to share information, and to have honest conversations. For a small charity such as AIMS, our campaigns work will only be effective if we develop strong collaborations.

This was the first time I'd attended this annual event. I come away with the sense that it was a great opportunity for AIMS to listen, to learn, and to collaborate. I will certainly look it up next time it's in town, and maybe I'll spot you there! Save the date: Manchester Central, June 11-12 2025.

Author Bio: Jo Dagustun has been an AIMS Volunteer since 2017 and lives in Greater Manchester.