AIMS For a better birth...

Jean Robinson 1930 - 2025

AIMS Journal 2025 Vol 37 No 3

By the AIMS



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(Jean speakng at AIMS 50th Anniversary Luncheon 2010)

We were deeply saddened to hear of the death of our former President, Jean Robinson at the age of 95.

As the funeral celebrant Kirsten Baker commented in her eulogy:

> "Jean was immensely and rightly proud of her involvement – always in a voluntary capacity - with the Association for the Improvement in Maternity Services. Her AIMS President badge was visible from her bed just very recently throughout her decline, signifying the huge significance this had for her."



(Jean and the AIMS committee modelling the "Don't mess with me! I am an AIMS Member" T shirts 2007)

Jean was a hugely influential and inspiring figure within AIMS and beyond. As Debbie Chippington Derrick said in a personal tribute:

> "She set AIMS moral and ethical compass which has continued to underpin our work today."

Jean joined AIMS in 1973, after her work dealing with complaints as chair of the Patients' Association led her to realise how many women were being traumatised by the widespread use of oxytocin drips to induce labour. Using her self-taught research skills she identified the lack of evidence to support this practice, which she highlighted in a letter to The Lancet.

In 1975 she took on the role of AIMS research officer. She was a frequent contributor to the AIMS Journal, with articles including hard-hitting reviews highlighting the evidence around key issues in maternity, and regular 'Research Round-ups' to explain the latest findings in clear, non-technical language. In this she set the standard for AIMS to provide evidence-based information in an accessible format. You can see some of Jean's Research Round-ups here.



(Jean at the AIMS 50th Anniversary luncheon 2010)

She also worked tirelessly on the AIMS Helpline, supporting women and listening to their stories. It was this combination of drawing on the voices of women and using her rigorous research skills that made Jean such an effective campaigner. As her daughter Lucy said at the funeral:

> "Jean talked a lot about ' a women's way of working', listening to and believing women, she read piles of letters and spent hours on the phone listening to women's experiences. She wove these individual stories together, connecting the dots between individual experiences, and used her careful research to hold structures to account…"

Having heard from many women who were feeling suicidal after giving birth, Jean successfully lobbied for suicide to be recognised in the Confidential Enquiries process as a leading cause of maternal deaths. Also drawing on her experiences on the Helpline, and together with our late Chair, Beverley Lawrence Beech, she wrote a letter to the British Journal of Psychiatry that is credited as the first published identification of post-natal PTSD. She followed this up with a presentation at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' symposium Maternal Morbidity and Mortality in 2002, pointing out that "most postnatal PTSD is avoidable - it is iatrogenic (an illness caused by medical care), mainly due to the way women are treated."{ref Post-traumatic stress disorder: AIMS' voice at the RCOG}. AIMS is still campaigning for the recognition of Obstetric Violence and its potential impact on the mental and emotional wellbeing of mothers.

Jean was also influential in proposing the need for a Charter for Ethical Research in maternity. This was subsequently drawn up in a collaboration between AIMS, the NCT and the Maternity Alliance and published in 1997 A Charter for Ethical Research in Maternity Care. This, and in particular the principle that "Research should be undertaken with women, not on women" is now widely recognised as the appropriate basis for maternity research.



(Jean at the AIMS Trustees Retreat 2015)

In an interview with Emma Ashworth, published in the AIMS Journal in June 2018, following her retirement as President, Jean expressed the wish for AIMS to:

> "Go on listening to women and representing their different voices. We will continue to succeed by perpetually challenging obstetricians for their evidence."

In similar vein, Lucy encouraged those at the funeral:

> "So work like Jean. Do the research, ask the difficult questions and ask them as loudly and publicly as you can, preferably with the press watching."

We hope that we in AIMS are honouring Jean's legacy by continuing to do this.

AIMS thanks Kirsten Baker and Lucy Robinson for permission to quote from their words at Jean's funeral.