AIMS For a better birth...

# Do women want midwives or obstetric nurses?

By Beverley Beech

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*AIMS Chair Beverley Beech reflects on the success of the Birmingham Conference.*

On the 1st October the Association of Radical Midwives (ARM) and AIMS jointly organised a conference, in Birmingham, to explore why midwives cannot support normal birth, and why women do not have any real choice within the NHS - and to come up with a strategy for real change.

While the rhetoric of choice suggests that women can get the care they want, the reality is that the majority of women have to accept what is on offer and the midwives have to do the best they can in an atmosphere that often does not support real midwifery practice or normality. Initially, it was intended that there would be 100 delegates, but 200 registered and many more were turned away.

One of the highlights of a conference, packed with first class speakers, was Steve Walker, the Chair of the NHS Litigation Authority, who came to explain the Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts (CNST). He handled well the stream of questions and examples of the difficulties midwives face as a result of CNST's requirements. Not only did the audience learn about the mysteries of CNST, but also he acknowledged that he himself had just undergone a significant learning curve listening to speakers and the audience, and invited representatives of AIMS, ARM and IMA to meet with him in the near future to discuss the problems.

Mavis Kirkham highlighted the problems midwives face working in environments that are not supportive of real midwifery practice. Jane Evans spoke about the issues an individual midwife faces daily, Barbara Hewson outlined the law, and Mary Cronk explained why midwives are reported to the Professional Conduct Committee. Lesley Price, a supervisor of midwives, demonstrated how CNST and good supervision can enhance the midwife's role, while Jean Robinson highlighted the concerns of consumers.

The star of the conference, however, was, Ruth Weston, the lay member who gave a presentation from a woman's perspective. She received a two minute standing ovation. Her presentation is printed in full on page 6.

The conference ended with a presentation from Brenda van der Kooy who showed how the Community Midwifery Model could give all midwives and women real choice in maternity care (seepage 10). Every delegate left the conference after seeing a video of beautiful births with an action pack to encourage them to be proactive. For those who missed it, copies of the Action Pack can be downloaded from the AIMS web site: Midwifery for the 21st Century - ACTION NOW