



Report of the Sheffield Home Birth Conference on 10 March, 2012

[AIMS Journal, 2012, Vol 24 No 2](#)

Report of the Sheffield Home Birth Conference on 10 March, 2012

There was great energy at the Sheffield Home Birth Conference. Expertly organised by Olivia Lester and Michelle Barnes, and very well attended for the fifth year running, the conference wove together the themes of endorphins, complementary therapies and home birth.

Mavis Kirkham set the tone with her presentation on Optimising Endorphins. She highlighted the role of endorphins in labour as a stress hormone and safety mechanism to help 'gentle down', slow or stop contractions – if the physical or emotional stress becomes too much for the woman. Equally, endorphins are a 'social hormone' and optimising endorphins and their intricate balance with other birth hormones is 'grounded in relationships'. It is vital that a woman feels safe in herself and in her relationships with her partner and midwife. The unique 'biochemistry between mother and midwife' means that a midwife's gentleness and calm presence, as well as her job-satisfaction and positive work-relationships (which enhance her own endorphins), contribute toward better birth. Denise Tiran spoke about different forms of complementary therapies (manual, psychological, energy-based, pharmacological, exercise, traditional systems) and the properties, effects and contra-indications associated with some common ones, including clary sage oil, raspberry leaf tea, moxibustion and eating pineapple. Over 80% of pregnant women use complementary therapies during pregnancy or labour, though most don't disclose it. It is increasingly important that midwives learn more, and communicate with women, about the potential benefits and risks of these powerful healing modalities, and what is right for each individual.

Dynamic and engaging as always, Maggie Howell, founder of Natal Hypnotherapy and mother of five home-birthed babies, explained some of the process of hypnosis for birth. Our emotions and fears, behaviour patterns, beliefs, instincts and body language are deeply embedded in our vast subconscious, but these are open to reprogramming when we can let down our conscious guard. Through focus, breath and relaxation a woman enters a 'hypnotic state' where she can hear suggestions about how she can respond to the sensations and events of labour, perhaps specific things she fears, and learn alternative ways of dealing with these. This is not about guaranteeing a pain-free labour or controlling labour, but instead improving her expectations and coping mechanisms. In the afternoon there was a difficult choice of excellent workshops to attend, including Maya Abdominal Massage with Bushra Finch, placenta encapsulation with Lynnea Shreif, waterbirth with Wendy Davis, Rebozo with Stacia Smales Hill, osteopathy with Chris Johnson and acupuncture with Jo Moon. Throughout the day we were able to

browse and chat at many stalls and collect goodies ranging from Pinards to Rebozo scarfs, books/leaflets galore and breast-shaped cupcakes!

We heard positive news of local services and statistics from Dotty Watkins, Nurse Director/Head of Midwifery at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. The Sheffield home birth rate is on target for 3.5%, with future plans to aid women in deciding on place of birth and to support home birth for those with 'complex needs'. Finally, Anne Richley, Sally O'Connell and Babita Williams described the creation of the Northampton Home Birth Team, which has achieved a home birth rate of 8% and a hugely successful structure where midwives 'love their jobs' and work well with community and hospital teams ... such an optimistic note on which to end the day and look forward to next year.

Jill Benjoya Miller

Active Birth and YogaBirth teacher, birth doula and mother of three