AIMS For a better birth...

# My name is Imogen

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*Imogen Jenner reports on her experience of bullying in the NHS*

I have been a midwife for a while now and I have seen and heard bullying within NHS maternity services on a regular basis. I used to go home quietly and say nothing until I became the victim.

Several years ago I was appointed as a senior midwife. I was told by a very senior member of the team to 'sort out the area you are allocated to, I trust you to just organise it and be passionate'. I decided to buy a book about management and find out how the area was organised, my mission was to get to know the staff and to take my time. Within three days I was pulled by my uniform sleeve in front of all my colleagues by my line manager who asked me 'have you said you are going to "sort me out"?' I was horrified but stated clearly that I would never say such a thing. This incident was only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg and, to cut to the chase, I eventually became too unwell to work.

Some of the things that happened to me included being told by two supervisors of midwives that I might get struck off after I'd challenged poor care; being put on the rota to do three weeks of nights despite being appointed to a Monday to Friday post; being victimised, shouted at and finally downgraded. I became depressed and was off work for several months, at one point I was so ill that I stayed in bed for almost four weeks: my family became my carers.

Fast-forward several years, I am now recovered and to my surprise I am still working as a midwife: I still see bullying happening but following my own experiences I am able to make a stand against it. I am not in possession of any superpowers and some days I go home upset but I accept help from my family and colleagues and I report it. I don't blame some of the midwives who try to bully me, I feel they are trapped in a culture and I try to raise awareness by challenging language used at handover and also by questioning unrealistic workloads; I liaise with the RCM and I'm compiling a letter to the Maternity service Review committee. Notice how I said, 'try to bully me', I have gained resilience.

The courageous act of displaying one's own moral values and beliefs takes determination and energy and can be exhausting. Imagine being the only member of staff to speak out in a shift handover on the subject of language and the kind of response this generates. Midwives are special people, present at the birth of a child, the beginning of motherhood and family life: they are responsible for educating women and families on pregnancy and parenthood and helping to alleviate and address fear of birth. Midwives' roles are varied and encompass the whole of pregnancy, the postnatal period and far beyond.

To be a midwife is to be responsible My aim as a midwife is to start each new day with a fresh mind, full of

hope, knowledge and passion so that I can embrace my role and support families as well as my colleagues. I aspire to treat each day differently but to maintain consistently high standards of compassion. I see each woman and family as individuals and practice evidence based holistic care.

I would like to add that I do see brilliant examples of excellence within my place of work. I visualise the Pareto principle [the 80/20 rule] and think perhaps 20% are bullies and 80% are not. My senior managers are very receptive to my words and thoughts and take me seriously; this is a huge move in the right direction to dissolve bullying within midwifery. The RCM is also reigniting their campaign against bullying and undermining behaviour ; newly qualified midwives are taught about the effects and signs of bullying and women are definitely becoming more assertive. So would I go through it all again? My experience has made me stronger and able to deal with bullying against others; I am feeling more positivity in the air and aware of drives to embody compassion within maternity services. There is increasing teamwork and positive debate between midwives and obstetricians.

Unless we all speak out and realise that we are caring for the world's sisters and brothers there will be no reduction in bullying. We must be gentle with one another, we must stand still and speak slowly, we must consider the way we move and the way we act. So I'd like to ask all midwives 'What is your aim as a midwife?' To be a midwife is to experience a glorious and beautiful vocation. Now is the time to name the issues and build cultures that care for women, babies and families and value staff, so that we sow seeds of kindness and goodness to all.

Imogen Jenner

**References**

www.midwiferyjournal.com/article/S0266-6138(14)00090-4/pdf

*Further Help*

If you have been affected by reading this, here are some contact numbers and resources. Please do not be alone seek help, talk to your friends and family or contact the AIMS helpline. The National Bullying Helpline: 0845 22 55 787 www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk email admin@nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk RCM/RCOG joint toolkit: www.rcog.org.uk/en/careerstraining/workplace-workforce-issues/improving-workplace -behaviours-dealing-with-undermining/underminingtoolkit/ Unison - www.unison.org.uk ACAS: 0300 123 1100