AIMS For a better birth...

Too busy to be nice

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Hayley Huntoon shares her frustrations at the lack of resources available

Yesterday a man came to me livid with frustration 'this is not good enough' he told me 'my daughter has been waiting hours to be seen.' He went on to tell me 'it isn't you. It isn't the other midwives, the care has been impeccable but the situation just isn't good enough.'

I know. I agree. I have shed too many tears over a career I could not love more because there is nothing I can do. What he didn't know was that heartbreakingly this is a daily occurrence in my life as a midwife. What he didn't know was that actually yesterday was a rare Saturday off for me yet I had come into work so that my amazing colleagues could have a break from their 13-hour shift: a break they won't be paid for whether they take it or not, but that they physically need as human beings. I had come into the unit so that women like his daughter could be seen: so that our unit could be open to women who needed our skills as midwives, doctors, health care professionals; women who were in labour ; women whose babies weren't moving much; women who were concerned about their own wellbeing.

Five maternity units in my region have been closed over the weekend: these women need our care. We are literally being worked to the ground. I am watching amazing midwives leave a profession they love because the workload and stress is too high.

The NHS is run on good will, but there is only so much we can take. We joke at work that midwives don't need to eat; to rehydrate; to empty our bladders or to sleep. Let us look after ourselves so that we can look after our women and our future generation of children. Over the past four years I have missed Christmas days, New Year's days, family birthdays and countless nights out. I had a good education and did very well at school; I am 22; I have held the hands of women through the most emotional times of their lives. I have dressed Angels we have had to say goodbye to; I have supported women to make decisions that empower them; I have been scared myself, tired, stressed, emotional every day. Yet I am not and will not be paid well like my friends who have chosen business careers. I am not offered pay rises for my efforts or successes. I don't care because I get something more valuable than that from what I do. I love what I do. I'm passionate about what I do, that's why I do it: but I do care that we are the ones who are being threatened with further cuts, further strain.

I am regularly met by stunned responses from women and their partners to the situation they watch me working under, but enough is enough. I have shed too many tears over a career I love; missed too many meal breaks; not physically been able to care for too many women the way I wanted to; spent too many

days off in work; lost too much sleep over the stress I am under ; watched more of my colleagues than I could count (myself included) be signed off work with stress in the early years of their career ; watched too many good midwives leave careers they love. This is not humane. Let's change this.

Hayley Huntoon Hayley is a newly qualified midwife working in a busy consultant-led maternity unit