AIMS For a better birth...

2016 - United Nations Population Award

AIMS Journal, 2016, Vol 28 No 2

Congratulations are due to the Polish 'Childbirth with Dignity Foundation' whose representatives, Joanna Pietrusiewicz and Ania Zdra will be travelling to New York on 23 June to receive this prestigious award from the United Nations Secretary-General. The award is in recognition of their campaigns and advocacy work over the last twenty years to inform, empower and campaign about the treatment of women in Polish hospitals.

The Foundation was, along with AIMS, among the original members of the European Network of Childbirth Associations. ENCA was founded in 1993 by the Society for Childbirth Education (GfG) and held its first annual conference in Frankfurt, Germany. ENCA's purpose is to gather together representatives from as many European countries as possible to exchange ideas and information and to support those lay organisations that are working to change maternity care for the better.

The Polish members were very excited when Beverley Beech showed them a copy of Sheila Kitzinger's book 'The Good Hospital Guide'. This book came about as a result of our past Secretary, Ann Taylor, suggesting that, like the Good Beer Guide, we ought to have a Good Hospitals Guide. AIMS had no money to work on it, but Sheila asked if AIMS would be happy for her to work on this idea. The committee enthusiastically agreed. The Poles, however, were concerned that they could not challenge medical interventions, and came up with the brilliant idea of a questionnaire that would indicate how well the women were treated in the hospitals with hearts being awarded to those with the best outcomes.

The Foundation created a website www.gdzierodzic.info (which means information on where to give birth), which helps pregnant women choose the best obstetric ward or hospital by providing information about the 404 obstetric wards and hospitals in Poland. It provides answers to questions about pregnancy, labour and maternity care, as well as articles, new research evidence, and statistics. The website seems to be leading to changes in some obstetric units as doctors, midwives and decision makers read the parents' comments about them and compare them with those about other hospitals. Over the years the Foundation has been contacted by over 8,000 women from all over Poland, which has enabled them to challenge obstetric practices and empower women to demand better care.

The United Nations recognition of their work is well deserved.