AIMS For a better birth...

An open letter to the NMC

AIMS Journal, 2017, Vol 29 No 1

From Birthplace Matters

We are writing to convey our despair at the decision by the NMC to shut down and persecute the profession of Independent Midwifery....

Since we started our Birthplace Matters campaign in response to the erosion of women's choices in Norfolk, we have received hundreds of birth stories from women from all over the UK and beyond. We have also had many ongoing conversations with midwives, birth rights campaigners, doulas and other birth workers about women's choices and rights and the different models of care available to them.

Sadly, we have received a great many stories of poor care within the NHS setting... stories of neglect, women treated like cattle, coercion and bullying, and lack of continuity. Please feel free to go and read for yourselves the difference it made being at home compared with being in the NHS setting at www.birthplacematters.org.uk/.

In contrast, we are yet to hear a single complaint about the care a woman received from an Independent Midwife. Independent Midwives take their responsibilities to women extremely seriously – their livelihood, reputation and future job prospects are at stake. An Independent Midwife is acutely aware that she has no one to hide behind and cannot blame poor budgets or staff shortages if the woman she serves receives poor care.

One of our own team, Jeanette, will be eternally grateful that she was able to have an Independent Midwife support her during her last pregnancy and birth, rather than being forced into a hospital she has never felt safe in. Being relaxed and at home with her husband and other children around her was all she wanted – like so many women who prefer a more peaceful and undisturbed beginning to her child's life.

Clearly, the NHS is getting some things right, and some women are very happy with the care they receive from their NHS Midwife. We do not dispute this. Some women absolutely prefer the clinical setting and some need to be there for medical reasons which we do not deny. Many do sterling work under difficult circumstances. We are in awe of so many NHS midwives who are champions of good practice, in spite of budget pressures and other restrictions.

However, given the current situation where home birth services all over the UK are being 'restricted' the decision by the NMC isn't one simply about choice of carer, but choice of birthplace. Stripping away one, leaves the other exposed too.

We ask, no urge you to honour the fact that women themselves should decide who they feel is most suitable to deliver their child. Trust them to interview and do the appropriate research and soul searching on something so very important. To take away this choice is to infantilise women and take a step backwards in women's history. This is a feminist issue and a human rights issue.

At Birthplace Matters we stand shoulder to shoulder with Independent Midwives and value their unique qualities, their unique position to care 1:1 for women with the utmost dedication, and question whether the NMC is putting more women in harm's way than any Independent Midwife ever has.

Sincerely and with heavy hearts,

Paula, Jeanette and Anna

Birthplace Matters Team

February 2017

www.birthplacematters.org.uk/#docs