AIMS For a better birth...

Twins and Multiples - Bringing back the joy!

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By AIMS Journal editor Emma Ashworth

At the centre of a multiples pregnancy is a woman who has the same rights to make decisions about herself and her babies as any other pregnant person. As always, AIMS focus is on sharing information to ensure that parents can make informed decisions for themselves, but this is especially important with multiple babies as the whirlwind of appointments, scans and medical staff that are offered, together with well-meaning but not always positive 'advice' or comments from friends and family, mean that remaining in control of your own pregnancy and birth can be even more of a challenge.

For parents who have just discovered that they are expecting more than one baby the road ahead may look confusing and challenging, and so Mars Lord, mother of twins and doula to many twin parents, has written about some key issues which parents of multiples may wish to consider as starting points and ideas as they begin their journey.

I was particularly keen to include information about Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS). As we all know, we don't know what we don't know and what I discovered that I didn't know was that TTTS is not a condition which affects all types of twins or other multiples. Many babies are simply unable to be affected by TTTS because their placentas are separate and so blood is unable to be transferred between them – something that would be very reassuring to a great number of twin parents. We are lucky to have a new contributor to the Journal explaining this condition – Rebecca Freckleton, another mother of twins.

We are hugely grateful to the midwives who have helped with this Journal, including our writing contributors, Helen Shallow and Chris Warren. Both of these experienced midwives have supported twin pregnancies with an eye towards normal physiology, and they show how with appropriate care and support, women can often have straightforward physiological births when pregnant with more than one baby.

Most of our birth stories are of twins, but mother of triplets, Rowena Hazell, took the time out from her schedule of raising five children to work with Mari Greenfield to share the births of her daughter and two sons, who all share a birthday. Vaginally birthing triplets is unusual these days, and Rowena's story shows incredible strength and determination to do what was right for her. This didn't stop after her babies were born as she needed to fight for the right to provide human milk to her babies, as she has the condition IGT

(insufficient glandular tissue), which means that she is unable to produce a full milk supply.

Having more than one baby means lots of preparation for life after birth, too. Nicola Lawson explains how practical carriers and slings are for twins. Babywearing doesn't need to be just for one baby. Kathryn Stagg, IBCLC (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant) and breastfeeding counsellor, shares her knowledge and experience as a breastfeeding supporter and mother of twins. Yes, if you want to, you can still breastfeed more than one baby.

2018 saw the retirement of our long-standing President, Jean Robinson. I interviewed Jean for this edition of the AIMS Journal, but I feel that her time with AIMS, and other amazing work she's done through her life, could fill a Journal all by itself. I have rarely been so inspired and awed by a conversation and I feel that I have captured only a fraction of the enthusiasm, commitment and determination that Jean has brought to every aspect of her life supporting others. One stand-out part of my interview with Jean was when she described an obstetrician writing to the Lancet, in response to a letter that Jean had written to them, "Who is this doctor hiding behind the skirts of this woman?" While we would all like to think that attitudes have changed, we all know someone who still thinks this way. Jean, you have been instrumental in huge changes that have happened in the world of birth and the rights of people using medical services, and we promise to take up your shillelagh and fight the good fight.

Final words of thanks go to Ruth Weston and Jo Dagustun for their summaries of the ARM Wigan Study Day and the Doula UK conference, and to Sangheetha Parthasarathy and Anna Culy for their book reviews. If anyone is interested in reading a book and reviewing it for AIMS, analysing research, writing articles, or volunteering for any other aspect of AIMS' work, please do get in touch at volunteer@aims.org.uk.

If you are pregnant with more than one baby, if you support women who are pregnant with multiples or if you are just interested in twins, triplets and more we hope that you will enjoy this Journal and find it helpful. In forthcoming issues of the AIMS Journal we plan to take a critical look at the implementation of Better Births; at infant feeding, and the gap that remains between the rhetoric of support for breastfeeding and what happens in practice; at the issues raised for the maternity services by a population of childbearing women that is being defined as increasingly "risky"; and at the impact of the maternity services on social inequality. If you are interested in any of these topics and would like to make a contribution, please email the AIMS Journal Group at journal@aims.org.uk. You will be welcomed with open arms!"