AIMS For a better birth...

Introducing the Make Birth Better Network: networking to address the birth trauma challenge

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By Emma Svanberg and Rebecca Moore

The number of social media references to the Make Birth Better campaign and network are growing, and you might be wondering what it's all about. Make Birth Better has grown from a small post on Instagram to a network of over 40 people. Together, we form a collective, working to raise awareness of the impact of birth trauma, to encourage trauma-informed care throughout maternity services and to offer support and training to others working with women and their partners who have been traumatised by birth.

The Make Birth Better campaign began when Emma Svanberg, who often uses social media to raise awareness of perinatal mental health problems, wrote on Instagram about the difference between PTSD after birth and postnatal depression. As a result of the responses received, many of which outlined women's traumatic experience of birth, she invited women to send her their birth stories. Over 70 stories were then analysed, and the key themes (which can be found at https://www.makebirthbetter.org/findings) reflected themes already well established in existing birth trauma research. These provided a starting point for Emma to consider what changes could be made to a woman's maternity journey to promote a more positive experience of birth, something which will now be explored more fully with the Network.

Whilst doing this, Emma connected with Rebecca Moore, a perinatal psychiatrist specialising in birth trauma – who founded an annual Birth Trauma conference (the next will be held in January 2019). Rebecca also campaigns for greater awareness of birth trauma and was hoping to set up a network of organisations and people from different personal and professional backgrounds to promote trauma-informed maternity care. Together, Emma and Rebecca have pulled together over 40 people who hope to bring their shared experience to the group - parents with lived experience, peer supporters, health and mental health professionals, research academics, as well as organisations such as AIMS, the Birth Trauma Association, the Positive Birth Movement, the Association for Infant Mental Health and Birthrights,

The Network has already held two meetings and is developing its mission statement and initial objectives. While meetings have so far been held in London, network members are located throughout the UK and we hope to address this in the future. The initial goal for the Network was to develop the Make Birth Better website to provide a comprehensive resource for parents, professionals and services.

This launched on 1st July and has been well received by parents and health care professionals. Our next goal will be to collaboratively create a model of a trauma-informed maternity journey, which services can draw from in their own practice.

As a group of people from many different backgrounds, we hope to offer a broad perspective on birth trauma, pulling together some of the brilliant work that is going on around the UK. By connecting professionals, third sector organisations and those with lived experience we can raise awareness, campaign, offer training, create resources and enable a platform for all views. As well as these activities, the Network also hopes to support its members as they champion this key issue in their own work. Please do visit the website and share it among colleagues and friends, and let Emma or Rebecca know if you are interested in being involved.

More about the Network founders

Dr Emma Svanberg is a Chartered Perinatal Clinical Psychologist with a special interest in birth and the transition to parenthood, writer and Perinatal Mental Health Advisor for the Positive Birth Movement.

Dr Rebecca Moore is a Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist, with a special interest in birth trauma and PTSD after birth. She organises an annual birth trauma conference and writes, blogs and speaks about mental health in the perinatal period.

Details of network members can be found on the Make Births Better website, where you can also request to become a member and add local birth trauma services to the Make Birth Better map which can be found here www.makebirthbetter.org/gethelp

Some definitions: what do we mean by birth trauma and trauma-informed maternity care?

Although for all parents birth is a huge life event, some can be left feeling traumatised by their experience. It is believed that 1-3% of women meet the criteria for PTSD after birth; many more are left with distress but do not meet diagnostic criteria. The Birth Trauma Association suggests that as many as 200,000 women a year in the UK may feel traumatised by their birth.

A difficult or traumatic birth occurs when women - or their partners- find some aspect of their birth traumatic, distressing, and/or fearful. It's not *what* happened that is important, but how you felt at the time.

Trauma-informed care in maternity services would encompass an awareness of the roots of a traumatic response, including the importance of compassionate care for patients and adequate support for staff, as well as offering additional support to those who might be more vulnerable (such as those with a previous history of trauma).