AIMS For a better birth...

Birth, Babies, Breastfeeding and Bonding

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Pipa Derrick reports on the AIMS talk in Bristol by Dr Sarah Buckley in August 2014

It was an average conference room, close to the riverside; the Watershed in Bristol. AIMS members, part of the committee and others, milled about and talked with others attending the talk. A common goal of a better world of midwifery united the crowd; mothers, midwives, doulas, and lay persons alike.

Visiting lecturer Dr Sarah Buckley stood before us all, introduced by AIMS chair, Beverley Lawrence Beech. She started by helping us to see that Birth, Babies, Breastfeeding and Bonding should be looked at collectively; that by separating them we fail to see the full picture.

Women are naturally built to be able to bring new life into this world, with a careful balance of hormones and bodily reactions within both the mother and child, so complex that we would be fools to think we could meddle without consequences.

The audience took part in a practical demonstration of how the hormone oxytocin can quickly give a positive emotional experience and Dr Buckley explained in detail how it was essential to many aspects of pregnancy and parenthood. That is not the only hormone in action; others such as beta endorphins and prolactin also have large roles to play. No matter how much we attempt to simulate, replicate or manipulate their levels we can't compensate for the numerous effects and linked processes of a natural birth.

The modern expectation for births to be observed and monitored also conflicts with the way the process has evolved over the millennia and surely can cause problems of its own. Sometimes if a mother feels threatened it can trigger the releases of fight or flight hormones which interfere with other hormones including oxytocin and can halt labour.

Over all it seems clear that we live in a medicalised world where we meddle too readily and often in systems we cannot hope to be able to comprehend completely. Perhaps if we were to show the natural processes the respect they deserve and trust that, as women, we are made to become mothers, that it is far rarer than we have been led to believe that we need the modern world to interfere, then many more of us might be able to have the positive birth experiences Dr Buckley described having herself.

Pipa Derrick