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Obituary: Clare Fisher

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Clare Fisher (28 September 1963 - 22 June 2018)

By Beverley A Lawrence Beech

When considering the requirements for a good midwife Clare Fisher filled the bill - and then some. She was kind, caring, tough, principled and formidable, and loved and respected by the women she attended, many of whom were cared for by Clare as an Independent Midwife.

Clare was not afraid to stand up and speak out when she saw bullying, poor practice, or injustice. Having been a Ward Matron by the age of 27, Clare qualified as a midwife in October 1993. After making a complaint about bullying, Clare found herself suspended from duty, later from practice - and subjected to numerous unwarranted referrals to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Clare had planned to write the second part of her experiences when she retired in September (see Beech, 2009 for the first part) fearing that writing it before removing herself from the register would lead to further reprisals. She has asked Roo, her partner of 30 years and husband of just 3 weeks, to finish the story on her behalf.

When executives of the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) belatedly investigated her concerns they were horrified. A 500+ page report (see summary below) vindicated Clare's concerns and complaints. Three times the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ruled in Clare's favour. On the last occasion the Welsh Government, acting for HIW, was forced to pay substantial compensation - and even then they attempted to offer a derisory settlement whilst insisting on a 'gagging clause'; an offer that was met with

a typically forthright response from Clare. To the end she believed the stresses of her treatment by the Local Supervising Authority (LSA) in Wales, the HIW, and the NMC had profoundly affected her health – and that no amount could properly compensate her for that, or for the damage to her family.

She maintained that the NMC was a body 'unfit for purpose', lacking insight into their own failings. She had made powerful enemies in Wales but found powerful supporters - such as Professor Paul Lewis (former Chair of the NMC Conduct and Competence Committee), and well-respected midwife, Mary Cronk (who praised Clare for providing a gold standard of midwifery care). In turn she provided support and advice to others. For the last six years of her life Clare practised as a midwife in Oxford where her skills, wacky humour, and commitment to women, were valued and finally appreciated within the NHS. Those parents whose births had been enriched by Clare's attention never forgot and will never forget.

Clare loved gardening, riding her bike, holidays with her family in France and Terry Wogan. Above everything she treasured her family – her husband Roo, and children: Adam, Olly, Josh, Jack, Phoebe and Ella. Her retirement in September was to be their time, family time, a time that has so cruelly been snatched away.

Clare died of Metastatic Adenocarcinoma of the Gallbladder and I have no doubt that the years of stress that she was subjected to by the combined activities of the LSA, Health Professions Wales and the NMC was a significant factor. Clare will be a huge loss to midwifery which sorely needs midwives of Clare's calibre if the profession is not to turn into obstetric nursing.

Beverley A Lawrence Beech is a long-standing birth campaigner and past Chair of AIMS.

References

Beech, B A Lawrence (2009) Clare Fisher - The Welsh Witch-hunt*AIMS Journal* 21 (3): 6-9

Clare Fisher – The Healthcare Inspectorate Wales' Findings

AIMS volunteers were saddened to hear of the death of midwife Clare Fisher, who died on the 22nd June 2018. It seemed that Clare was eventually getting the justice she deserved in 2013, when the Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW) published findings into the actions of the Local Supervisory Authority (LSA), actions which caused this woman-centred midwife so much harm.

The report was nothing short of damning, raising, amongst other issues, the fact that the LSA failed to keep adequate records, failed to provide information and to communicate effectively, failed to identify and manage conflicts of interest, failed to act within the timescales set out in their own guidelines and failed to operate openly and transparently.

The HIW was unable to confirm that Clare Fisher was treated fairly, nor that staff were impartial, and they stated that 'The LSA's actions in this one case was neither professional nor accountable. This has been to the detriment of the midwives involved (most notably Clare Fisher herself), public protection,

and the reputation of the LSA in Wales.' They go on to say that '… The failures in this one case are extensive. …'.

While the review may have given Clare some relief before her death, the fact that she was forced to go through such a terrible supervisory experience should raise concerns with anyone who supports woman-centred midwifery, and strengthens the determination of AIMS to continue to work in partnership with others to keep the performance of UK maternity-service-related supervisory bodies under close scrutiny.

Health Inspectorate Wales' Findings (2013). Midwife CF: Desk top review of HIW 's actions. Full report. July 2013, p1-520.