AIMS For a better birth...

Philippa Micklethwaite, Countess of Limerick (1914-2009)

AIMS Journal, 2009, Vol 21 No 1

Philippa Micklethwaite, aged 94, widow of Sir Robert, died peacefully at home on 13th January, 2009. She first came to AIMS' attention following our continuous lobbying for the implementation of 'Human Relations in Obstetrics'. In 1960, Professor Norman Morris gave an inaugural lecture at the opening of the new Charing Cross Hospital which emphasised the need for improvements in the way in which some mothers were treated during childbirth. This was followed by the Maternity Services Committee report in the House of Commons and the presentation by Professor Norman Morris of Human Relations in Obstetrics, an exposé of women's dissatisfaction of maternity care.[1]

By 1970 AIMS was calling for this document to be updated and at a meeting with the then Minister of Health, Gerard Vaughan MP, many years later, AIMS was assured that the document would be published 'soon'. By 1981, in order to resolve the impasse (allegedly caused by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists refusing 'to be dictated to by a bunch of civil servants') the Ministry announced that it was forming a multidisciplinary committee to consider all the issues in maternity care, and that a lay representative would be on the committee. AIMS immediately asked for two representatives and the Ministry agreed and appointed two women, one of whom was Philippa, Lady Micklethwaite, then President of the NCT. The NCT, at that time, was not known for its radical ideas and the general feeling was scepticism that the Ministry had appointed two token women who would be pretty ineffective. The reality was very different, they turned out to be two women who were extremely able committee workers.

Before attending the Maternity Services Advisory Committee Meetings Philippa contacted the maternity groups and invited representatives to regular meetings around her kitchen table in her flat in Victoria. We discussed what we wanted to see in the final reports and Philippa and her colleague, the Honourable Mrs L Price, then fought tooth and nail to ensure that most of the users' proposals were accepted and included in the final reports.

Considering that they were two user voices in a large committee of over 30 members, dominated by doctors, they were amazingly successful in persuading the Committee to accept the majority of our proposals. The result was a series of three booklets Maternity Care in Action (the first was published in 1982) which recommended good practice. The Committee also recommended that every Health Authority should have a Maternity Services Liaison Committee with lay representatives on it.

Thanks to Philippa, Maternity Services Liaison Committees have provided a consumer voice and an opportunity for consumers to influence the quality of maternity care.

Reference

1. Morris N (1960). Human relations in obstetric practice, The Lancet, p 913.