AIMS For a better birth...

Resolution – Moving forward from a bad birth

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By Emma Ashworth



For years, AIMS produced a small book called "Making a Complaint about Maternity Care" which looked at the different ways that women and people who were unhappy with their maternity care could complain. With changes to the structures of the organisations involved, the book needed to be updated, but it became very clear from the experience of the volunteers on theAIMS Helpline that there is more to coming to terms with birth experience than just making a complaint. Making a complaint can be therapeutic for some people, but for others it can just add further trauma. What AIMS wanted was to provide information about the different options and to enable informed decision making in this aspect of the maternity journey too. We also wanted to help parents to understand better what they might experience when complaining or taking other actions. For example we often hear from parents that instead of receiving an apology they are dismissed, their experiences denied or even told that they are wrong. Phrases like, "I'm sorry that you felt that ….." are often used instead of the apology being about what has happened.

We needed another way. In our new book, *The AIMS Guide to Resolution After Birth*, part of a new series of guides for women, pregnant people, birth workers and supporters, we look at a variety of ways that people can find Resolution about what happened to them during birth. This might be through the complaints process, but it might be through other ways.Shane introduces the book in our first article, and we also have a diagram of many of the different options available to help women to navigate the various paths to find Resolution.

Regular readers of the Journal will recognise Beth Whitehead's name as she's previously written about her traumatic and abusive birth experiences. In this edition of the AIMS Journal, Beth describes the ways that she attempted to find Resolution through the traditional channels, giving a clear picture of what is happening to so many women when they try to use the systems which are supposed to protect us but in fact so often deny us justice. We hope that by publishing this article it will give the organisations involved some incentive to change their ways.

Emma Svanberg of Make Birth Better has written a fantastic explanation of two of the different treatments for birth trauma which are available on the NHS. CBT and EMDR can both be helpful for many people who have experienced birth trauma – whether they gave birth themselves or witnessed it – and EMDR is often more appropriate for PTSD.

Nija Dalal shares her experience of breastfeeding twins, and how she eventually resolved low milk supply caused by poor advice and support by the NHS as well as serious illness after birth. Thanks to the knowledge and support from her doula she was able to access someone who could help. She also had the Continuity of Care from the doula she knew and trusted to support her and give her the confidence to keep going against the odds.

Many birth trauma experiences are caused by our rights being run roughshod over during our experience of labour, birth and postnatal care. Clinical negligence lawyer Stuart Bramley explains the "Montgomery V Lanarkshire" ruling which clarified the fact that medical staff are obliged to offer to share information that is important to each pregnant woman and person, rather than the doctor or midwife paternalistically making decisions FOR them. Knowing this can help pregnant women and people to feel empowered to ask more questions and not tolerate just being told what is going to happen if they're not comfortable with that.

AIMS is excited to announce that we have a new Trustee who has just joined our team, long-time birth campaigner and doula Verina Henchy. We are delighted to have an interview with Verina in this issue, so do read it and get to know her a little better!

Also in this edition of the AIMS Journal, Dr Rehana Jawadwala explores an important health issue: why are "lifestyle" issues such as weight and smoking frequently a large part of antenatal care, whereas support for exercise has less focus, and sometimes a negative focus.

New AIMS Volunteer Emma Mason has written a beautiful account of her first birth for us. An inspiring story of a woman who took control and did what was right for her and her family. Finally, Marein Schmitthenner explores the life of a woman that we should all know about: Francis Oldham Kelsey. If you don't know about her and how she saved thousands of babies from death or severe disability, click over there right now!

This is the third Journal of 2019, and the final issue will be on the topic of hormones. If you would like to contribute to that or any other AIMS Journal, or have any comments or feedback, please contact the

Journal team at journal@aims.org.uk. We hope that you find the articles interesting and useful. If so, please, do share them widely!

Emma Ashworth

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