AIMS For a better birth...

Birth Activist Briefing: Introducing England's new Regional Chief Midwives

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In 2019, Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent was appointed England's first Chief Midwifery Officer[1]. AIMS has welcomed this appointment, as a demonstration of the importance of midwifery leadership at the national level. Based in NHS England and NHS Improvement, alongside other national leaders including Ruth May (Chief Nursing Officer[2]) and Matthew Jolly (National Clinical Director for Maternity and Women's Health[3]), one of Jacqueline's initial objectives is to improve midwifery leadership across the country. This year, Jacqueline has been busy appointing a team of Regional Chief Midwives, and there is now a full team of seven in place covering the whole of England.

Already, there are signs that this new structure is making a positive difference. Earlier this year, AIMS was pleased to see the role of the Regional Chief Midwife recognised in NHS guidance about the local handling of the coronavirus pandemic[4]. AIMS looks forward to the further development of the role, as these regional midwifery leaders each work to bridge the gap between NHS England and local trusts, offering increased scope for two-way communications about key maternity service improvement issues. This should considerably strengthen the ability of NHS England to properly implement the Maternity Transformation Programme, based on the vision of Better Births[5] (2016).

In particular, AIMS looks forward to this enhanced leadership structure significantly improving the implementation of the roll-out of the Continuity of Carer[6] programme across the country. We would encourage the Regional Chief Midwives to report regularly on this programme. Their contribution should underpin a positive culture of implementation in which momentum is maintained and the quality of implementation ensured, within a framework of increased accountability and transparency.

With each of the Regional Chief Midwives working with a small number of Local Maternity Systems, AIMS is sure that these new post holders have an important opportunity to improve the functioning of our decentralised maternity service, offering much of the benefit of a coherent National Maternity Service, where best practice is shared, postcode lotteries are a thing of the past and no one is left behind. We wish each of the new Regional Chief Midwives well in their new role and look forward to hearing more details about what they will be doing and their achievements.

Region	Name

South East	Jenny Hughes
South West	Helen Williams
London	Kate Brintworth
East of England	Wendy Matthews
Midlands	Janet Driver
North East	Claire Keegan
North West	Claire Mathews

Action for Birth Activists:

We encourage you to note who the Regional Chief Midwife is for your area. Then you might like to write to congratulate them on their appointment, express your hopes for what they will be able to achieve based on your own local insights, and share any concerns about midwifery provision in your area or about the impact of service changes during the pandemic. The AIMS Campaign group (campaigns@aims.org.uk) would be interested to hear about what you have asked and the response you receive.

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1 www.england.nhs.uk/nursingmidwifery/chief-midwifery-officer
2 www.england.nhs.uk/author/ruth-may
3 www.england.nhs.uk/about/structure/ncd/#mat
4 Clinical guide for the temporary reorganisation of intrapartum maternity care during the coronavirus pandemic - www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/04/C0241-specialty-guide-intrapartum-maternity-care-9-april-2020.pdf
5 Better Births Basics #1: the Better Births vision, AIMS Journal 2018 Vol 30 No1- www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/better-births-vision
6 Campaign Update: Continuity of Carer and Better Births Implementation, AIMS Journal 2019 Vol 31 No4 - www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/coc-campaign-update