AIMS For a better birth...

Looking back to move forward

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I am honoured to be writing the editorial for the AIMS 60th Anniversary Journal. When AIMS was founded in 1960, the NHS was only 12 years old. AIMS' history is closely intertwined with the changes we have seen in the NHS over that period of time. The early AIMS Newsletters and later the AIMS Journals provide a window into the experiences and concerns of those using and working in the maternity services over those six decades.

We, the current AIMS Volunteers, stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, benefitting from the understanding that has been developed over the decades, passing what we do from generation to generation. So it is an appropriate time to celebrate AIMS Volunteers, those who have gone before as well as our current Volunteers, and to look forward to welcoming new Volunteers who are our future. AIMS is, and always has been, its Volunteers.

It is important that we not only celebrate the AIMS names that you will have heard over the years, but also the unsung heroes who have kept the AIMS ship afloat, those who have carried out management and admin roles, that have allowed others to be able to provide information and support, or campaign. One example of behind the scenes work was the scanning of all our early Newsletters and Journals. These had been carefully saved, and then scanned by Volunteers, meaning that we have nearly all our AIMS

Newsletters and Journals to draw on for this Journal. This enabled us to look back, and share some of that content with you. We still have an ambition that at some point we will be able to share all that content on the website.

In the early years, AIMS started publishing a quarterly Newsletter which was sent to members, and these quickly started to develop to include articles, book reviews and other pieces that you would expect to see in an AIMS Journal today. The first edition that was published bearing the title 'AIMS Journal' was in Spring 1982, and at the beginning of 1989 the first Journal bearing a Volume number was published. Volume 1 No 1 was titled "Death of Choice" and focused on the demise of GP units.

So, now to the delights of what we have for you in this Journal. My fellow Trustees have each spent time reading the Newsletters or Journals from one of the decades. I am very grateful to them for their insightful reviews of these, highlighting how things have changed, or not, since they were written. I have really enjoyed reading about what they found interesting from each decade and I hope that you will too.

Dorothy Brassington, our AIMS Treasurer, writes about the Newsletters from AIMS' first decade and highlights an interesting list of what AIMS recommends which starts with more midwives! Shane Ridley takes us through the Newsletters of the 70s. She reports on how AIMS started that decade by carrying out a large survey reaching 2600 people, no mean feat when these all had to be sent and returned by post, and the results put together on paper. She concludes with a quote from an AIMS member asking 'Have we in AIMS got our priorities, right?' a question which we do try to make sure we keep asking ourselves, and one that we would love to hear your thoughts about.

Verina Henchy looks at the Newsletters and Journals of the 1980s focusing on the issue of Ultrasound about which the same questions are still being asked today.

The articles of the 60s, 70s and 80s have not been made available online before, but some of that content is now available now on the following pages www.aims.org.uk/general/1960, www.aims.org.uk/general/1970 and www.aims.org.uk/general/1980, including those which Dorothy, Shane and Verina talk about. So please, when you have finished reading this Journal, do have a browse.

Nadia Higson takes us through the 90s with warnings about over use of drugs such as oxytocin, rising caesarean rates, difficulty getting support with VBAC and access to waterbirth; which as she says all sound a bit familiar, but she manages to find good news too, news that we need to hold onto to continue moving forward with the work we do.

Emma Ashworth follows the waterbirth issues into 2000s, she then discusses what AIMS was saying about how women and midwives were being traumatised by our maternity services. She also looks to where we are going in the work we do, and I would like to repeat her words "Knowledge is power, and sharing knowledge is sharing power". This has been the strength of AIMS right from the start and is crucial for our way forward.

Virginia Hatton looks at the last decade focusing on three key issues. The first of these is the issue of the

privatisation of the NHS with the Health and Social care act of 2012, and the impact on Maternity Services. She then looks at what AIMS has been saying and doing on the issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity in terms of gender, and finally at the issue of racial equality and the clear health inequalities which have now been made so apparent.

We are very pleased to also be able to include an interview with Baroness Julia Cumberlege who chaired both the Changing Childbirth report and the latest English Maternity Review leading to the Better Birth report. She congratulates AIMS on achieving 60 years, and commenting that "AIMS have kept up the momentum, understood the changing world and how they can contribute" and that she hopes we will keep up the momentum to try to achieve the 28 recommendations of Better Birth. She also talks about the midwife's skill at the birth of her first baby, with a GP in attendance, the normal medical back up for midwives at the time should there be problems during the labour or birth.

The book review in this Journal is of Tania McIntosh's book 'A Social History of Maternity and Childbirth: Key themes in maternity care'. The book looks at maternity care from 1902 to 2002, and includes an exploration of the role of AIMS in promoting improvements in the maternity system.

We have a full Campaign section in this Journal. In the second 'What has the AIMS Campaigns team been doing?' we update you on the activities of the last three months. We bring you the first 'Birth Activist Briefing' which introduces the Regional Chief Midwives from NHS-England. We hope to make this a regular feature, providing information about maternity services which we think Birth Activists will find useful. We will particularly focus on changes that are happening and will be making suggestions about action that can be taken. Please do have a look and consider taking up the suggestions andletting the campaign team know how you get on. We also comment on the preliminary report from the UKOSS surveillance study on COVID-19 in pregnancy.

We are very pleased to have Tinuke Awe and Clotilde Rebecca Abeintroduce the Five X More campaign. They tell us how they came to found the campaign, what the issues are and what they want to see happen to start to address the health inequalities for black women having babies in the UK; and how you can help to support their work.

Natalie Carter, Consultant Midwife at Chelsea and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust,talks about how they have managed their midwifery service since March 2020despite restrictions due to Covid-19. As the AIMS comment says at the end of the article, we had reached out because we heard that they were not following many other NHS Trusts in shutting down services that women were telling AIMS were more, not less, crucial, for them during the pandemic. The campaign team would be very interested to hear from women who have received care from Chelsea and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust since March 2020 , and how well they feel that their needs have been met.

I would like to finish by coming back to the importance of AIMS' Volunteers, Members and Supporters. AIMS is what we all bring as individuals choosing to be involved in different ways. We do appreciate those who share AIMS information and we do have a mailing list which can be signed up tocan be signed

up to here. However, without our Members we would not be able to continue financially and without our Volunteers we could not put together the Journal, publish books provide birth information pages, run the helpline or campaign.

Whilst working through the content for this Journal I found a piece in the 1990 Journal which said that membership was being increased to £18 per year, and was struck by the fact that is has only gone up £7 in 30 years (it would be just over £41 if we had raised it in line with inflation). We have felt for a while that we don't want to increase the finance burden on our current Members, but instead reach out to a larger group to help us continue.

For our sixtieth we have been asking YOU to raise £60 pounds and/or to recruit six new AIMS Members. If everyone who read this editorial was able to do one of those things YOU would have put AIMS in a very good position to be here for the generations of the next 60 years.

So please, if you are not a member then please do consider joining us and if you are, consider who else you know that should be and talk to them about what membership of the AIMS Charity supports. If you would be interested in taking part in the challenge to raise £60 for the 60th, there is more information on our fundraising page.

And if you have some time to offer to AIMS as a Volunteer, then please do considering joining our growing team. Over the last few years we have developed ways of working which have enabled more people to get involved, many doing small occasional tasks that only require an hour or two infrequently, others get involved in ways that require a regular commitment, with a smaller number whose lives have come to revolve around AIMS. Currently we have about 50 active Volunteers keeping AIMS moving forward. For more information about getting involved, from supporting us with specific tasks occasionally, being involved with the management of our work or becoming a Trustee, please see our vacancies page.

Also to celebrate AIMS 60th we have been asking for your stories about what AIMS has meant for you. We want to collect 60 short stories which we can share in the Journal, on our webpage, on social media and at our 60th birthday event (which has been postponed until June 2021 due to coronavirus). We would love you to share your stories of what AIMS has done for you, your family or friends. Please send us your story (maximum 250 words) and a photo if possible to campaigns@aims.org.uk. We have a few we can share with you here.

I don't think that those who banded together following Sonia (Sally) Willington's letter in appeared in a national newpaper, nine months after she wrote it, realised quite what revolutionaries they were and quite how they were at the forefront of consumer organisations driving change. AIMS has continued for 60 years as a Volunteer run organisation – led by volunteers, managed by volunteers, and the work on the whole is carried out by volunteers. This is a challenge for us as Volunteers balancing work, family and volunteering, but one that is hugely rewarding, too. I was asked years ago whether what I did was a hobby, after a moment or two thought my response was 'no, it is an obsession'. I find it very difficult to

turn away from the plight of others trying to 'navigate the system as it exists' but would really like to think we can get to a point where we have 'a system which truly meets the needs of all'.

So, please share the Journal and other AIMS information, recruit new AIMS members and Volunteers, and light your candles.