AIMS and Social Media

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By Julie Ann Crowley

Long gone are the days when AIMS relied on people stumbling across our website online through search engine queries, or word-of-mouth between birth workers at a recent birth or antenatal event. Although these routes continue to contribute to our reach, AIMS is seeing great exposure and engagement as a result of having a dedicated social media team. Our creative minds and the fantastic software at our fingertips allow us to create really attractive and engaging posts, using images of women and birthing people from all walks of life.

This year started off with a heavy focus on recruitment. In order to achieve the maximum reach across social media, we required more volunteer team members. Our plans to expand the team got off to a great start, with the help of social media itself! Instead of relying on word-of-mouth and advertisements on the website alone, we used our platforms to advertise volunteer posts across the whole of Facebook and Instagram. We found that groups that already have a personal interest in maternity services, such as student midwife communities and Maternity Partnership Voices groups around the country, have been the best breeding grounds for recruits of late. New volunteers Lizzie and Ellie joined us in September and you will see their personal touches on AIMS posts from now on.

Volunteering for the AIMS Social Media team requires a set number of hours dedicated to administering requests, analysing responses, and retrieving information from a variety of resources in the fields of medicine, NHS policies, and personal experiences in maternity services. Since we are all people with young and older families and other jobs and responsibilities, the only way to ensure that the team can commit to a set number of hours is to increase the headcount. Personally, as a single mother with a baby son and an 8-year-old daughter, coupled with my passion for attending to absolutely anything and everything AIMS-related, I find it helpful to know that I have a team of volunteers who are always there to support each other when it comes to keeping our accounts active and engaging. On average, each of us contributes about 3–6 hours per week to AIMS, in a team of three members. Our work has inevitably increased this year due to the reports of Covid-19 affecting women and birthing people's rights and experiences, as we really need to keep our finger on the pulse and try to include all announcements and any progress on the topic, in order to keep our followers and the public updated. During these busier times, I have found myself working in excess of 16 hours per week for AIMS, but I know that it is all work that goes towards benefitting the public.

Working with the social media team is easy to fall in love with! Every time that a person clicks 'like' on a post that you created yourself, feels like a virtual little pat on the back and a massive boost for the profile of AIMS. Personally, I am also finding it easier to explain to my family and friends what I do and what I stand for just by sharing AIMS social media posts with them. It's easy to see what we stand for and what we continue to work for, just by viewing AIMS's profile on social media and all of our previous posts.

Social media has also been an important medium in our calls for help and support with campaigns. Recently, we put out a request for women and birthing people to consider contacting us privately with their stories of maternity care during the pandemic. Although painful to read at times, the response has been amazing and is helping AIMS with research around the disparities between trusts in the UK and their policies surrounding birth partners and their presence.

In some of our social media posts, we also ask for people to engage in a way that directly helps some of our authors and our campaigns group. In June, we asked our followers for their thoughts on the third stage of labour and birthing the placenta. Our AIMS community did not disappoint! Suggestions for inclusion in the next AIMS book on the third stage of labour ranged from the benefits of consuming one's placenta to creating memorable art with it. In addition to this, important points were raised for women

and birthing people to remember their choices and rights when it comes to delivering the placenta and their entitlement to view it and keep it, as opposed to the common assumption of some practitioners that one would not like to see it. Some people shared pictures of their placentas on the conversation thread about the third stage of labour. I found it amazing that people were willing to share such a personal thing online for all to see, in what we hope was a helpful way to remove the stigma around this most valuable organ being seen as 'gross' or inappropriate. Facebook stats informed us that almost 6,000 different people viewed this post on Facebook alone, and we like to think that this was perhaps the first time that some of them had ever seen pictures of real-life placentas.

Another aspect in which our presence on social media platforms has been invaluable is the impact it has had on book sales! Recently, it was shared with me that — immediately after our Facebook post advertising the AIMS online bookshop went live — book sales took off massively. We believe the engagement with the original post also increased after we shared it onto other notice boards and groups which our target followers are members of. Another 'win' for book sales and fundraising for the charity was our completely sold out Zoom workshop in November, which saw attendees receiving a copy of our new book, *The AIMS Guide to Your Rights in Pregnancy & Birth* (principal author Emma Ashworth).[1] Over 20,500 people viewed this post and it was shared 179 times by people to other pages, groups, and via private message on Facebook. With a follower base of 9,000, this is pretty impressive!

By far, our highest performing post published so far this year has been the one in July about updates to the NHS guidelines on birth partners being present in maternity care.[2] A massive 74,000 people viewed this post on Facebook, which really illustrates how important this issue has been for maternity service users this year. On average, our posts prior to that reached around 1,000 people. The cascade effect of having someone click like, comment on our posts, or share them across the platform really does make an impact to our reach.

We have a great responsibility to ensure that AIMS's professionalism is consistently maintained online. Information is shared left, right, and centre on social media around the topics of pregnancy and birth, and what we are seeing with the number of people sharing our posts and tagging us in their own posts is that AIMS is widely trusted as one of the most reliable resources out there. The content of posts is curated and approved by a select few trustees, which ensures that any statements made online are backed-up with evidence and the correct referencing of sources.

AIMS has been campaigning for a long time: 60 years this year! But all of a sudden, we have seen a massive surge in followers, due to various campaigns pushing to try and get access back for women and birthing people within NHS trusts across the UK, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before a group of doulas came up with the catchy #ButNotMaternity hashtag, doulas and birth-workers across the nation had been posting publicly about the very sad situations that people were finding themselves in and tagging AIMS in their posts. This has meant that our letter templates, evidence-based guides, and birth information pages have been pushed into the limelight not only by the social media team, but by our followers clicking the share button or creating short social media 'stories' that feature our posts. We have also seen the beginning of a coalition of charities and organisations with AIMS, including Birthrights,

Pregnant Then Screwed, Make Birth Better, Birth Trauma Association, the Fatherhood Institute, and But Not Maternity. Originating from a clear pattern in the public tagging us all alongside each other in social media announcements, personal stories, and pleas for action, this coalition brings our followers together, creating exposure for both this campaign and for AIMS's work beyond the pandemic.

In a world where convenience and speed seem paramount, AIMS needs to be present on social media given that it is a place where a multitude of interested audiences are found. Businesses and individuals trawl social media and subscribe to certain buzz-words and hashtags in order to be alerted when a topic of interest is discussed. Platforms softwares are also becoming more intuitive — you may love it or hate it — when it comes to 'pushing' certain posts into the limelight using algorithms. This allows them to recognise what else a particular user may be interested in when they look at a post from AIMS. This happens even when we log in as AIMS admins rather than users! Therefore, it makes sense to subscribe to certain buzz-words and pages in order to see updates as and when they happen. In turn, these enable us to stay in touch with events occurring in the world that we otherwise wouldn't have been able to see. And it is all free! As a charity, AIMS needs to utilise the free tools available to us to get our work out there. Through social media, with a small team of dedicated volunteers, we can reach 74,000 people in an instant, for free, with invaluable information regarding their maternity care!

With the Covid-19 pandemic bringing injustices in the maternity services into the limelight, we hope that people will continue to follow us for decades to come. The issues that existed long before the present circumstance will invariably still remain in our futures. We urge our followers to keep sharing and re-tweeting our information and, most importantly, to remember that in a room full of a buzz about pregnancy and birth: mention AIMS.

Editor's Note: If you are interested in volunteering with the AIMS Social Media team, or in other AIMS volunteering opportunities, please contact enquiries@aims.org.uk

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1 www.aims.org.uk/shop/item/aims-guide-to-your-rights-in-pregnancy-and-birth

2 www.facebook.com/AIMSUK/photos/a.392070900861830/3058774174191476/?type=3