AIMS For a better birth...

Choice in the Maternity Services - Expressing ourselves via poetry

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When the AIMS Campaigns Team spotted that the theme of this year's National Poetry Day (October 7) was 'choice', they just knew this had the makings of an AIMS competition/book giveaway! With the help of the AIMS Journal Team, who agreed to take on the very tricky job of deciding our winner, the competition was underway…

Thank you to everyone who entered the competition. We really enjoyed reading all of your entries. The judges were tasked with selecting just one winning poem, and we are delighted to share that with you here.

So, congratulations to Catherine Bell, for the poem that the judges selected as overall winner. Alex, one of the judges, told us why she chose this chilling poem: "I was taken by the way that, as the reader, my attention was focused on the midwife and the father. This made me feel complicit, as if I too was ignoring the mother. I was disturbed by the way that we do not see the woman giving birth until the end - and then, only at the point of her defeat. It beautifully illustrates the idea that 'choice' is not part of what we see… when no one knows we are looking."

We hope that you enjoy reading Catherine's poem, and also the poems of our two runners up, Paula Cleary and Tessa Kowaliw.

Competition winner:

Consenting number 3

a poem by Catherine Bell

"I'm off to consent Number Three"
Said the midwife on the busy ward.
Checking her watch, she marched away.
More checks on her arrival, in Number Three,
A monitor thumped, a machine beeped
And the midwife noted it all down.

A man sat in the corner of Number Three.
Looking lost, worried and bored.
The midwife smiled at him.
“I’m just going to see where you are at”
The midwife said, to no one in particular.
As she snapped on the latex gloves.
A groan rolled around room Number Three.
A low, primal, sound that was ignored.
“Time to get things moving along” was announced.
The man blinked in the corner of Number Three
As the midwife suggested it was time for surgery.
The source of the groan muttered.
The midwife and the man looked at the woman in Number Three.
She was saying ‘I do not want surgery’ between groans.
“Of course you do dear, you want the best for your baby”
The man nodded, as he stepped over to the woman in Number Three.
“I just need more time”, whispered the woman.
As she was patted and soothed condescendingly.
A doctor came presently to assist in consenting Number Three,
To get the ball rolling, to explain the reasoning
Interrupted and confused, the woman seemed to agree.

Runners up:

More Tools

a poem by Paula Cleary

You've forgotten the scope of your role's to advise
But I've researched the facts and you're telling me lies!
It's not really kind, nice, ethical or wise
Saying "Do things my way, or your baby dies!"

When I say I have different plans for my babies
You look at me like I've gone mad
Or got rabies!

Can you stick to advising what's evidence-based please?
I'm not one of those easily pushed around ladies!

Not in your remit to allow / not allow
This patriarchy is just getting SO old now

I wanted your help but you've started a row
Please rethink your manner or quit, take a bow!

Relaxing at home gives my body a chance
For the hormones of birth to swirl in a dance
No machines to compete with my midwives' glance
No bright lights or protocols stopping labour advance

And I know that if things take a turn, I'll have tried
But it was never your place to get to decide
And I wanted my birth team right here by my side
And to feel a bit mammal, feel safe and to hide

There are things that help birth that most people don't know
So perhaps you could allow your knowledge of these to grow
Like spinning babies, biomechanics and using rebozo
That enable the passage of baby to flow

If my baby REALLY needs help I will gladly submit,
To your knife, and your skill, and your medical kit,
And I'll thank you and know that although that it's shit
I gave nature a chance but knew when to quit

Where's the choice?

a poem by Tessa Kowaliw

They stole our words, then
Emboldened, engorged they
Regurgitated us to
Feed off our blood.
Where's the choice in that?