

Description

An Unexpected Award

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Introduction

Recently something remarkable and amazing happened to me which left me quite literally speechless. I want to share my experience as I hope it will inspire other midwives to recognise that the little things are so important and can lead on to something so big.

#MaternityGoodEggs

Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, Chief Midwifery Officer for NHS England, was paying a visit to our maternity service at the Royal Derby Hospital, which is part of the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Trust in England. This in itself was an exciting event. Our team was invited to attend a meeting with her and my manager asked me to tag along.

When I heard the word ‘presentation’ I assumed we would be listening to a talk with some slides and settled myself down to listen. The speaker, Janet Driver, the Regional Chief Midwife for the Midlands, then presented a testimonial of a staff member. It wasn’t until I caught mention of a campaign I started named #MaternityGoodEggs that it suddenly dawned on me that she was talking about me!

Apparently my face was a picture when the penny dropped.

So there it is, little old me, a Band 6 midwife splitting my time between working in the birth centre and managing our NIPE (Newborn and Infant Physical Examination) team has been awarded a silver Chief Midwifery Officer award!

Inspire others

So why has this happened? I am going to run through some of the things mentioned in the amazing testimonial they read out about me. This is not about boasting about my achievements. I consider all of these things to be quite small. But I am blown away by this award and I feel a sense of responsibility to try to use it to inspire other midwives and



d I really hope that my award might make e of team spirit.

Back in 2017, I came up with an idea of pushing someone to theatre with a camera attached to their head to capture the woman's perspective. You can see the film we made here. This resulted in a project which was implemented with our *Birth Outside the Box Group* at Derby called #TheatreChallenge. You can see all the information about this on my you tube channel here. #TheatreChallenge was inspired by #LithotomyChallenge, part of the WhoseShoes work lead by the fabulous Gill Phillips, which aims to encourage health and social care practitioners to see things from the view point of those they serve.

For the Theatre Challenge we took it in turns to lie on the bed whilst being pushed into theatre. We encouraged participants to reflect on how this made them feel and little things they could do to improve the experience. We tried to involve everyone – midwives, obstetricians, theatre staff, anaesthetists, health- care assistants, even hospital governors! We posted the comments and pictures on social media and it went viral. We were even short-listed for a celebrating success award within our organisation.

I was asked to speak at a local midwifery conference about this and then was invited by the Picker Partnership to present at two events to Heads of Midwifery from around the country. I will never forget the feeling when, at our local conference, as I finished my presentation, everyone stood up to applaud. They were not just clapping for me but for what we had achieved as a team and you could see the pride on their faces. We had done something amazing!

Quietly passionate

Speaking at a conference was a massive thing for me. I would not have considered myself a public speaker. I didn't even like to raise my hand in meetings. I was quietly passionate about my work but not someone who would speak out. Suddenly I had to find my voice. I learned to channel my passion and use it to involve other people.

It was incredibly daunting and nerve-wracking but as time went on my confidence grew. You can read more about what I consider to be my own personal journey here. Somewhere in the midst of Theatre Challenge I stopped being a quiet and shy midwife. I recognised that anyone can bring about change and that the crucial thing is finding your voice. This is what has motivated me to keep doing little things that I feel are important.



So back to the special day when I received the award. The testimonial that was read out commented on my poems. I enjoy writing and over the years have produced a number of maternity-related poems including the light-hearted Twas the night before Christmas and the more serious Our Job and How do we bear the day written for Baby Loss Awareness Week, both of which relate to midwifery care during pregnancy loss.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit maternity services hard. In the beginning not only were we struggling with the impact of the virus on staffing but rules and regulations were constantly changing and the restrictions meant we faced some incredibly challenging situations emotionally. So I wrote I am still a midwife, with the aim of reassuring women that they could still expect to enjoy their birth during the pandemic and this was shared via our local Maternity Voices Partnership.

I also wrote a poem about Pregnancy Loss in COVID Times in recognition of how this impacted the women, their families and also the staff providing care. Some of my poems have since been shared thousands of times on social media. Poetry is a powerful way of sharing feelings and messages that are important. I feel a huge sense of pride that my poems have been shared so widely on social media and am incredibly moved that they were mentioned as part of my award.

System to support

Part of my role as a midwife for the past few years has been to develop our existing NIPE programme. I was given the task of maintaining our system and improving our referral service. However, I could see that we needed to do work on expanding our team, ensuring the maintenance of skills as the team grew, and in creating a system to support student midwives, who are now completing NIPE as part of their undergraduate training.

This has been challenging at times but our service is now one that I am extremely proud of. The work is so diverse, from following up referrals and producing quality reports, to hands-on teaching and practically supporting staff and trainees both within maternity and beyond. I feel so lucky to be a part of this wonderful team.

The testimonial also referred to the little projects I put in place to motivate members of my team and raise morale. I love the fact that they referred to them as “little” as that is exactly what they are. But it just goes to show that little things can have a big impact. Most people do not have the time, the influence or the means to set-up big projects and changes but anyone can set themselves a small, achievable project which can still have a big impact on people.



I firmly believe that a team who feel good about themselves will work better and the consequences will be improved teamwork and increased safety. I also believe that it is the little things we do that increase morale.

I post a daily positive quote on social media, I run #MaternityGoodEggs every Easter to encourage staff to share positivity about members of the team. Then there is #MaternityAdvent which celebrates maternity in the run up to Christmas. I also encouraged the team to reflect on their favourite pandemic moment for the International Day of the midwife in 2020, which my daughter Bea edited into a beautiful little film. It never ceases to amaze me that when I ask people to do these crazy tasks, they do! The fact that my senior management team value these qualities enough to put me forward for an award demonstrates to me how much my workplace values these things.

Breaks my heart

So I feel I have been given this award for raising morale and being kind. This is a remarkable thing in a time when maternity has suffered so much negativity and criticism. I feel incredibly proud to work for a trust where these qualities are clearly valued. But I am not special. I am a midwife like so many others who care about women and about birth, who want to be an advocate and improve safety and experiences.

A midwife who can see how much her team has struggled with the impact of the pandemic and media criticisms of wider maternity care. I see so many midwives leaving our profession because they feel disheartened and disempowered. It breaks my heart to see those I respect and love working with, so broken. I simply do my best to try to lift spirits and to encourage everyone to focus on the positive in what they have achieved.



Receiving an award like this is incredibly humbling. I think it says as much about those who have nominated me and those who have made the award to me, as it does about me. I was nominated by our Director of Midwifery Patti Paine and our Head of Midwifery Lorri Purcell. This demonstrates the values that they consider important for their maternity team.

The nomination was supported by my manager Jo Ryalls and what a manager she is! Jo has been my manager for a long time. A fantastic midwife, she is also an inspirational leader in the way she nurtures her team, acting as our advocate and instilling her core values to the birth centre team – she has helped to shape me into the midwife I am today. I am so incredibly grateful that she has acknowledged me in this way and feel so privileged to work with her.

I am so grateful that I was able to become a midwife and for what I get to do each and every day. I love the team I work with and feel it is so important that we nurture one another. This award is not just for me. It's a beacon for every midwife who brings light to what they do and nurtures those they work with. Keep doing the little things because they really matter.

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