

Description

Care Quality Commission 2022 Maternity Survey

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Introduction



The findings of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) 2022 Maternity Survey were published January 11, 2023.[1] The purpose of the survey is to provide an insight into the experience of giving birth in the United Kingdom (UK) for those that access, work in and commission maternity services.

The survey, which is undertaken annually, involved the participation of 121 NHS maternity units – a response rate of 46.5%, with 20,927 voices contributing. Data was collected from women who birthed between February 1 and 28, 2022.

In the event that the NHS did not have a minimum of 300 live births in February the survey was extended to births that occurred in January, with feedback being collected between April and August 2022.

The full report can be accessed here.

This most recent survey highlights that the experience of maternity services has deteriorated in the last five years. Maternity care (specifically care during labour and postnatal care both in and out of hospital) has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Sadly, the findings of the survey echo other investigative reports including the Ockenden report,[2] and the East Kent 'Reading the signals' report.[3] In addition, there have been numerous articles published that continue to be highly critical of maternity services further reiterating an urgent need for change.

Key findings

From the CQC survey three key areas for improvement have been identified:

- Availability of staff.
- Confidence and trust.
- Communications and interactions with staff.

These findings are disheartening although the first point is not surprising to midwives and obstetricians working in maternity services as they experience the effects of chronic underfunding and the well-documented shortage of midwives.

In order to address this issue, investment needs to continue to increase the midwifery workforce. Recently, it was revealed that there has been a 22% drop in applications for undergraduate midwifery courses in the UK.[4] A multifactorial approach is therefore needed to encourage applications for undergraduate courses now and in the future.

The relationship between culture in the workplace and staff wellbeing are key factors that are required to ensure that care provided is physically, psychologically and culturally safe. In order to remain motivated and flourish at work, three core work needs for midwives have been identified:

- Autonomy – the need to have control over their work lives, and to be able to act consistently with their values.
- Belonging – the need to be connected to, cared for, and caring of others around them at work, and to feel valued, respected and supported.
- Contribution – the need to experience effectiveness in what they do and deliver valued outcomes.[5]

Compassionate leadership embodies the three core values and focuses on building relationships so that individuals do their best at work and are empowered to provide high-quality care.[6] A tool that can be utilised to improve the culture in the workplace is providing positive feedback to individual's when there has been a positive experience and/or outcome. When we receive praise at work, we are more likely to be kinder in our interactions with staff and those in our care leading to compassionate care.

We are all responsible for the culture that we work in, and there is real benefit to those working in maternity services adopting a compassionate and inclusive leadership style to support those we work with.

> Even when we have a shortage of staff we should know the importance of positive communication that is kind and respectful.

When this does not occur there is the potential for those in our care to have a poor experience and/or adverse outcomes due to women and birthing people not being listened to.

These areas are inextricably linked to one another and by having a robust workforce, who feel valued, cared for and respected, women may have more confidence and trust in maternity services.

The report identified positive findings from the survey which included:

- An improvement in reported delays with hospital discharge from 2017 to 2022.
- Mental health support offered, women being asked about their mental health during pregnancy and following birth.
- Women were more likely to report positive experiences of maternity care if they have continuity of carer (CoC) or have an unassisted vaginal birth.

Listening to women and birthing people

These positive findings from the survey echo the Cochrane review on midwifery led CoC which identified that women who received midwifery led CoC were less likely to have intervention and were more likely to be satisfied with care.[7] Once maternity services have recovered to pre-pandemic levels it would be pertinent to revisit how all women and birthing people can experience CoC so that they can have a positive experience of childbirth in the UK. Maternity services need to continue to innovate, using evidence-based practice and work in partnership with birthing women, people and families.

Obstetrician Florence Wilcock recently delivered a TEDxNHS talk and said, “now is the time to step up and help more women find the sweet spot, not safety or experience, nor baby vs mother, but safety and experience, baby and mother, to help facilitate a safe birth and positive birth for as many mothers and babies as possible”.[8]

> I would like to recommend that all midwives and obstetricians watch Florence’s talk and suggest that it could be included as part of maternity service’s multidisciplinary training to enable teams to understand what is important about childbirth.

Midwives, with their teams, should review the findings of the survey to seek out how their maternity service was reported, to celebrate the positive findings and identify ways to address suboptimal areas.

Although there are challenges due to reduced staffing levels in the workplace, midwives and obstetricians must prioritise listening to birthing women and people and believing them if they express a concern or worry. It doesn’t take more time to be kind. Now more than ever it is essential that midwives are supported to serve those in their care so that they are heard, valued and respected during pregnancy and childbirth.

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