

Description

Celebrating the class of 2020

Sarah Neal – Band 6 Rotational Midwife Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust

I remember when I first met the first year students in 2017. I was blown away by their drive and commitment to becoming midwives.

They came from all different walks of life – women with their own young families who were having to arrange and pay for childcare, young women moving to a new city and having to find ways to support themselves and young women living at home so their parents could help support them as they essentially paid for the privilege of coming to work long hard shifts and learn alongside us.

This was the first ever cohort of NHS student midwives who were required to pay full course fees for their university education, and also not have access to a bursary while they were working the long hours essential for their clinical learning.

Yet there they were, fresh faced and keen to learn. All of them so passionate, and so dedicated to their dream of becoming a midwife; their dream of being 'with woman', their dream of being in such an honoured position to support *other* families through such a special and important time in *their* lives. At that time, I can honestly say I was not sure how they were actually going to be able to do it.

It's not been an easy 3 years. As anyone who has completed their Midwifery training knows, it is a complete and utter roller-coaster of an experience, with incredible highs and incredible lows. It is physically, mentally and emotionally draining. This particular group of students had already faced some incredible challenges and had been through some really tough experiences even before the events of 2020 began to unfold. Yet they continued to ride the roller-coaster. They reflected, they learnt, they supported each other and they grew. It has been impressive to witness.

Then, as they were half way through their final year, so close to achieving their dreams – the Covid 19 Pandemic hit. They were thrown into complete uncertainty. Were they going to be able complete their training? What would the last 6 months of their training look like? The wards were changing rapidly, the clinical guidance was changing daily, the University closed, their lecturers were now working from home, we were all waiting to hear what would happen next for them. It was a very unsettling time. Then came the choice. Work the frontline during a global pandemic or step back and defer qualifying until next year.

Our student midwives support us every year. They enrich the care we give women and families, they support their mentors, they help us to keep up to date just as much as we help to teach them. More than ever this group have over come so much and given so much of themselves, and they have all passed their degrees with absolute flying colours! It has been inspirational.

So I realised that due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions their graduation has been postponed, they would not be able to

have a family party or celebration, they would not even get a few weeks break for breathing space, that they would go from being ‘Band 4 Aspirant Midwives’ one week to ‘Band 5 NQM’ the next. They’d had no ‘last day’ at uni, no chance to be together as cohort one last time. None of those important experiences that help to bring closure to that part of your life, and help you move into the next chapter of your life – and that just did not sit right with me.

After everything they have given, I was strongly motivated to give them the acknowledgement and recognition that they very much deserve. I also felt that they needed to mark the transition from ‘Student’ to ‘Midwife’ in a meaningful way.



I planned a small ‘drop in’ Graduation so that we could ‘manage numbers’ and make sure we were never more than 6 in the space that we had. I prepared props to be able to take proper graduation photos and invited the group to attend but asked them to come dressed up as if they were attending their real graduation. A few of my colleagues supported the event and provided decorations, cupcakes, (alcohol free) champagne, ‘welcome to the team’ congratulations cards and gift bags. Our friends and colleagues in other departments supported us by making the lovely Graduation Certificates to present each one of them with.

I prepared a ‘motivational playlist’ and had music playing in the room as they arrived. It was lovely to see them all out of uniform, happy and dressed up!

I took the ‘official’ photos which prompted lots of discussions on the challenges they had faced and overcome. We all chatted, we all reflected, we all celebrated and we all acknowledged just how incredible it is that they have ‘made it’ and

achieved their dreams. Then we went outside and threw their graduation caps in the air (it just has to be done!) and I gifted them the caps to take home to allow them to get photos with their families.

I feel like a real midwife now!



Before they left I presented them each with their own wooden Pinard stethoscope. A graduation gift from me. A symbol that they are now midwives. A right of passage. Each Pinard labelled with their names followed by the very important letters ‘RM’, with the quote ‘She believed she could, so she did!’

Later that day I received individual messages from all the members of the group thanking me, and most importantly saying ‘I feel like a real midwife now’.

The fact is they have always been midwives! They just had to go on one heck of a journey to be able to own it and be able to say it. I am so glad I have been able to support them in making that last finial leap.

Positivity, passion, determination and commitment is what has got them to this point. I am so proud of them, and am looking forward to seeing where the future takes them.



Sarah is a Band 6 Rotational Midwife working at Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust.

She qualified in 2003 at Leeds Met University and treasures her training so much. Sarah was given such a positive foundation to her career by a wonderful midwife educator who's voice is still present in her day to day clinical work to this day.
Sarah has worked at Rotherham for 15yrs and in January 2020 she was nominated by HoM June Lovett to represent Rotherham as part of the NHS England Midwifery Ambassador network.
Sarah said:
'The Midwifery Ambassador Programme is part of Our Chief Midwifery Officer, Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bents three Key Ambitions.
The main focus of the Midwifery Ambassadors is the positive perceptions of the midwifery profession – encouraging young people to see midwifery as a real career choice, to positively support the current workforce of qualified midwives and to raise the positive profile of midwifery with the general public.

The Ambassadors are a team of passionate, motivated and inspirational midwives who have become an incredible support network for each other during recent times- sharing information, guidance and creative ideas. The team are all dedicated to working together to promote, support and raise the roar for our profession on a national and international platform'
You can find Sarah on Twitter @SNealrm and Instagram sa_pie81

Category

1. Aspiring Students
2. For You
3. News & Views
4. Student Midwives

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1. aspiring students
2. midwives
3. newly qualified midwife
4. student midwives

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