

Description

#InspiredByYou

Katie Watkins – Integrated Digital Midwife, Wexham Park Hospital @watkins3112 on Twitter

When I first qualified as a midwife in 2016, I had all the same emotions and feelings that I'm sure many of you felt. Excitement, terror, wonder… anxious about what was to come but looking forward to getting stuck into my career doing a job that I loved so much.

Being a midwife is truly special – we often get told that we are so lucky, or that it was a career choice that someone just wishes they had pursued all those years ago. And they're right to feel that way, it is a unique privilege to be part of a woman's journey to motherhood. But it's also really tough. Shift working alone is not for the faint hearted, especially when you consider that within any one shift you may be required to go from one room where a family has suffered a tragic loss, to another where the families are experiencing the most euphoric moment of their lives.

How on earth does anyone cope with such a dynamic shift in emotions?

Mostly, we don't. On the surface we do, and we continue to provide fantastic, compassionate care, but often that is at the expense of our own health and wellbeing. We become drained both physically and emotionally. Not only that but we are constantly reminded that the decisions we make are life and death and despite our tiredness, we just cannot afford to get it wrong.

We rely so much on the support and comfort of the team of professionals around us, fellow midwives, doctors, care assistants and management. The teamwork and camaraderie is often what gets us through the shift and is ultimately the cog that makes the NHS work. Whilst the support is crucial to every one of us, we also need to feel appreciated and cared for. Sadly, management don't always have time to 'Thank You', or appreciate what you do as they are firefighting their own issues – managing tight budgets, stretching staff to cover twice their workloads and probably feeling exhausted and unappreciated themselves.

Even just a few years into my career, I had accepted that this is just the way the NHS is, what I'd signed up for. Don't we all know the story of the NHS – the exhaustion and lack of appreciation, it's just what working life in the NHS is all about. But should it be?

I really started thinking about it and then, last year I decided to do a masters module (and to anyone taking on a masters whilst working full time, I salute you). I enrolled onto 'Leadership in Healthcare' and focused on staff health and wellbeing as my leadership issue to investigate.

Researching for my essay, the penny dropped. If midwives are suffering, then you can almost guarantee that the women are suffering too. It was no longer about wanting midwives to feel valued (although that's hugely important), it was about safety. I was overwhelmed with the evidence showing that if midwives are feeling stressed, undervalued and stretched

at work, then patient satisfaction decreases. And even more shocking was that morbidity and mortality increased as a result! I guess I always knew that in the back of my mind, but now I was seeing it in black and white.

However, even taking part in the module and attending lectures, I felt out of place thinking ‘I’m just a midwife, I shouldn’t be on a leadership module’, and ‘This is all very well, but I can’t change anything’.

> The more I learnt, and the more I researched I realised EVERYONE has the ability to make a change, and EVERYONE is a leader.

Well, that was it, I was on a mission. I tried little changes at work, and although it was nice and welcomed by staff, it wasn’t the impact I was hoping for. I needed something big, a grand gesture to show maternity staff **‘you are incredible, you are valued, you are important’**. And that’s where ‘Inspired By You’ was born. I wanted a whole day event, where all members of the maternity department could attend; midwives, maternity care assistants, ward clerks, housekeepers, everyone together to be pampered and feel special for the day.

I pitched the idea to the Head of Midwifery who thought it was great and gave me the go ahead to start the planning process. With the dedicated help of a few colleagues, we started making enquiries and the first step was the venue. I had a venue in mind; a 5-star luxury hotel where celebrities frequent and the England Rugby team train and stay. I didn’t think it was possible but was bought up with the mentality that you ‘don’t ask, don’t get’. And it was at that point that I first started to comprehend the support that is out there for those that work for the NHS. We contacted so many organisations to help us in this endeavour and found that with the simple mention of the NHS the help and donations just start pouring in. It can become so easy to focus on negative comments we get or terrible headlines in the news, but if this process has convinced me of anything it’s that people LOVE the NHS and appreciate our work so much.



Pennyhill Park was the venue in mind, and not only did they provide two of their beautiful conference rooms for free for the entire day, but they treated us like royalty from the very beginning of the planning process right up until the last guest left. We then had to fill the space with therapists who jumped at the chance once we explained that they would have the opportunity to pamper local maternity staff. We had around 30 therapists give their time to treat 160 members of staff to some well-deserved pampering. Every single attendee received at least 2 treatments, ranging from facials, massage, reflexology, make up lessons – it was incredible to see.

Then I approached the CEO of the Trust – or more accurately, he popped into our staff room one lunch time to see how we all were, and I grabbed the opportunity to chat to him about my plans. He jumped at the chance to show appreciation to the maternity department and quickly passed on details of those who could help within the Trust and they decided to fund the food and drink for the day. And I’m not talking your bog-standard buffet spread, we had winter vegetable soup, freshly made wraps and a stack of the lightest scones I’ve ever tasted paired with enormous bowls of homemade strawberry jam and clotted cream. We had silver cutlery and china mugs to drink our unlimited selection of assorted teas

and coffee from for the entire day.



Image Credit: Gareth Davies / Studio GD Photography Facebook – www.facebook.com/studiogdphotography Instagram - @studiogdphoto Twitter – @studiogdphoto

We also had kind donations from our RCM branch, the maternity unit and some local companies to fund free gifts for goody bags for every single attendee with treats such as bath salts, lip balm, water bottles and pens (because what NHS employee doesn't love a free pen?!). Whilst attendees were waiting for their treatments, they could take part in complimentary yoga and receive nutritional advice whilst a photographer documented the whole day with photos free of charge. Each session was rounded off with a motivational speaker; one of which being Gill Walton – CEO of the RCM who inspired us all to work together, nurture our leadership qualities and kick of the celebrations of Year of the Nurse and Midwife with a bang.



Image Credit: Gareth Davies / Studio GD Photography Facebook – www.facebook.com/studiogdphotography Instagram - @studiogdphoto Twitter – @studiogdphoto

And my favourite part, the free raffle! What a raffle – 40 local and national companies freely and gladly made some incredible donations ranging from free spa days, bottles of gin and meal vouchers all the way to family weekend

camping tickets to Bestival! In total, we had around 60 gifts meaning that over a third of our attendees left with some amazing prizes and big smiles on their faces.

The logistics of getting almost the whole maternity team to attend the day meant that management covered people on the wards so that they could leave their shift to attend, and they stayed late so that anyone on a night shift didn't have to leave the event early. It this doesn't prove they supported us then I don't know what does. Initially, I wanted to organise the day to show the maternity staff that the department and management appreciate them, but what I didn't anticipate was that the generosity and kindness of so many companies would show them that the community also has their back. This showed me, and hopefully my colleagues that people care, they truly do. So many times, when asking for help from companies, I would be told that their son, daughter, nephew or granddaughter were born at Frimley Park Hospital and that they had always wanted an opportunity to give back. It made me realise just how much we matter to the community, we are remembered more than we know and form a part of these people's lives forever.



Image Credit: Gareth Davies / Studio GD Photography
Facebook – www.facebook.com/studiogdphotography
Instagram -@studiogdphoto Twitter – @studiogdphoto

All I hoped for at the end of the event was that my colleagues enjoyed their day and felt valued – and my goodness did we achieve it! My social media went crazy after the event with my colleagues posting that they felt inspired, proud and motivated to work for The Trust, the NHS and with their colleagues. I had e-mails, private messages and flowers turning up to my door with people saying that in the 25+ years that they had worked for the NHS they had never seen or felt anything like it.

> There was a buzz back on the wards, and for days after people were still talking about it.

Hopefully other teams can be inspired by this success and have the confidence to reach out to management and their communities so that they can feel some of what we felt. The positive energy and good will from those around us has made its way back to the ward, the staff and most importantly the women and their families, because ultimately.. that's where it all began. **#InspiredByYou**

Category

1. All4Maternity Blog
2. For You
3. Leadership
4. Midwifery Leaders
5. News & Views
6. Nurture
7. Nurture at Work
8. Nurture Others

Tags

1. kindness
2. leadership
3. midwives experience
4. self-care

Date Created
30th January 2020