

Description

Life as a First year Midwifery Student During Covid-19 in the UK

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A dream come true

After years of dreaming of becoming a midwife and never thinking I was good enough, I somehow managed to convince the lecturers at my university interview to give me a place in September 2019. I still can't believe it even now. I am a

mum of two and a mature student, and I waited until my daughters were old enough to go to school, so I had time to concentrate on my studies. And six months in, what happens? A global pandemic and we are in lockdown — for the foreseeable future.

I know how ridiculous I sound, but after being bored in a job that just ticked me over for the last 14 years, training to become a midwife was the most amazing thing to happen to me for a long time. I had brought up two beautiful girls, who had left me to go to school, my husband has a successful IT career, so university was MY thing. The thing that makes me happy and keeps me busy. I am so passionate about it and even though I am only six months in, it's my life and I feel like it's been taken away from me.

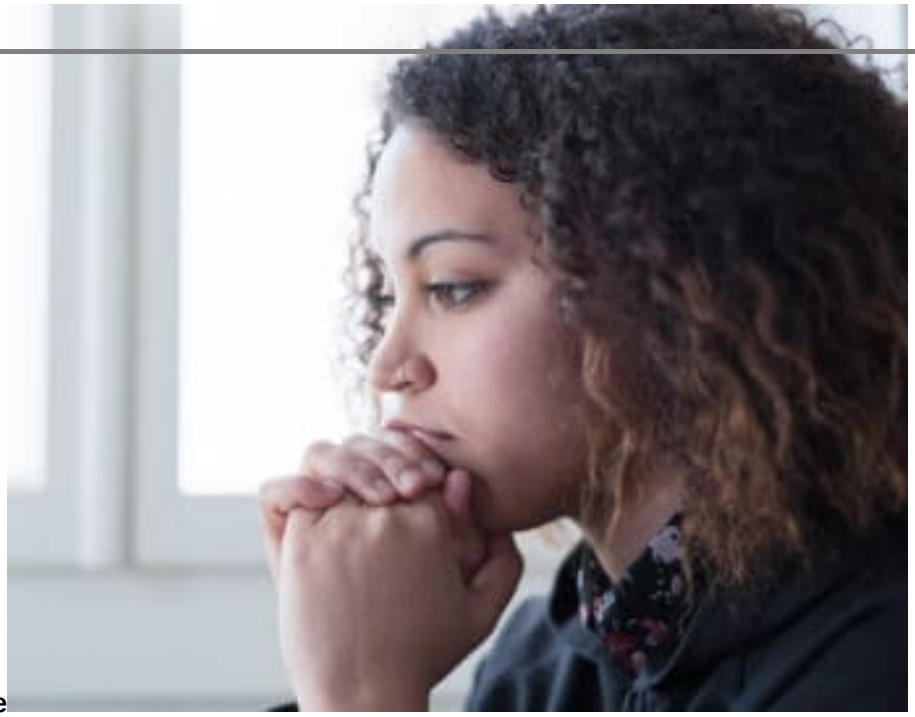


When COVID-19 first started coming over to the UK, my hospital maternity service held meetings that lecturers weren't invited to, and students weren't allowed to attend either. As you can imagine, rumours about whether our placements would be cut short or not were flying around everywhere. I was halfway through my labour ward placement and was absolutely loving it. My fellow students on the wards and in the community were being told that we were to be pulled from our placements sooner, rather than later.

The labour ward midwives were reassuring and seemed to think students would not be removed. The senior midwives were convinced that students were not going to be affected by the COVID-19 changes, so getting the email from my university to say that we were not allowed back into clinical practice came as a little bit of a shock, and the ugly crying started. No one asked us what we wanted. My cohort is made up of 27 strong, independent, brave women; and between our hospital sites and our university, no one person seemed to think that our opinion was valid, or worth asking for. When we graduate, we will have no option but to carry on as normal in times like this. I completely understand students being removed from practice if they have underlying health issues and do not feel safe, but isn't this the same for qualified staff?

We want to help

In times where birthing partners are being limited and staff numbers are down, it seems crazy to me to get rid of supernumerary team members like students, who are not being paid by the National Health Service (NHS). On busy shifts, we are more than just students. We are the midwives' assistants, the women's advocates, the tea-makers, the hand-holders, the givers of reassurance, the cleaner-uppers, we do far more than just sit and observe. As supernumerary members of the midwifery workforce, we have extra time to assist with breastfeeding and other important tasks, such as orientating clients to clinical areas. Surely these little things would help midwives enormously at this time. We want to help, that's why we signed up for this career in the first place.



A no-blame game

As of now, the midwifery team at my university have had very little contact with us in the three weeks we have been out of practice. There is no plan for us as yet, and no option for us to work as health care assistants (HCA's) and have this work count as clinical placement hours. We received an email from the University Dean to say we should have a plan by the 3rd of April. But this did not materialise, and we didn't get an email to say the team was running behind or that the promised information would be delayed. I have put my heart and soul into my university experience. I feel let down and disappointed, and there is no one to blame.

When I was leaving my final shift, the midwives asked me to sign up for the bank, as they were desperate for HCA support. I did this the following day, as I thought I might get a little more experience from just being there. My hospital has since put up advertisements on social media, pleading for people to join as HCAs because they are in short supply. I have tried to follow up this opportunity but have yet to receive a response. I have worked in the hospital for the last few weeks, so I know where everything is. I have perfected my hospital bed folds too, but it feels like I am not considered good enough to be employed by them. I completely understand that all aspects of the NHS are being strained and I am not the only person going through this. But I really want to help, and no one seems to want me.

The loneliness of the unknown

It is amazing how lonely you can feel in a house full of people you love more than anything. My husband is still working and chatting with his mates, my girls are so well behaved and have just cracked on with their homeschooling. I am just here waiting for something to do. All my friends are still working, and my fellow students are seeming to enjoy the time off. All I want is some sort of plan, or a date when we will know what is going to happen. Am I being selfish? All I have done since being home is cry and sleep. Am I depressed? Am I just being unreasonable? How can I be feeling so pants, when people are so ill?

Final thoughts from Alicia and The Student Midwife team

Please join the Student Midwife Journal Facebook group and @the_student_midwife_journal on Instagram for inspiration, nurturing and support, we have loads of self-care advice and the team are available for you to speak to should you wish. We don't want anybody to suffer with worries and concerns alone. Please note that Alicia is in touch with this student midwife author for support and we'd like to thank her for being so courageous in her writing.



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