

Description

Midwives face huge barriers returning to work due to lack of childcare, says RCM

16th April 2024

A lack of flexible and accessible childcare options for midwives' risks heightening Scotland's maternity workforce challenges. The warning comes as an RCM motion calling on the Scottish Government to take immediate steps to provide accessible, affordable childcare across Scotland including wraparound care was adopted at yesterday's session of the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC).

> Combined with the struggle to recruit new midwives into the profession it paints a worrying picture for the future of maternity care.

At the Congress the RCM argued that addressing the lack of accessible childcare options would significantly help address Scotland's maternity workforce challenges. Currently 60% of midwives are forced to work part time due to lack of adequate childcare. This is contributing to the high turnover of midwives in the NHS and one of the main reasons they give for leaving is lack of childcare that meets their needs. Once gone, their valuable skills and experience take years to replace. Combined with the struggle to recruit new midwives into the profession it paints a worrying picture for the future of maternity care.

"One thing the Scottish Government could do now to make a huge difference is to give much more help for childcare to midwives and all healthcare professionals," says Jaki Lambert, Director for Scotland at the RCM: *"It's shocking that something that's so fundamental to helping women do their job is so difficult for them. Women make up almost all of the maternity workforce yet over half of them have to work part time due to childcare constraints. Over the long term this in untenable and there needs to be incentives in place to make it easier for midwives to work more flexibly. An obvious way to do this is to make sure they have affordable childcare.*

Having flexible childcare is crucial too continued Jaki. *"Midwifery is a 24/7 role, 365 days of the year. Midwives need to be free to provide cover at all hours of the day plus regular periods of on-call and responding to emergencies and home births. The recent Scottish Women's Budget Group found that 16% of women who are entitled to free hours are unable to access them due to a lack of flexibility. Midwives are particularly affected by this as they work irregular and unsocial hours. We know many having to rely on family members for help, and at the extreme end, some leave the profession entirely to save money on childcare."*

The full motion the RCM proposed along with the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) was:

Congress calls on the STUC to campaign for:

- accessible, affordable, and available childcare across Scotland, including wraparound care;
- increased access and reduced or supported costs for safe and flexible childcare, to enable families to contribute to the workforce without being forced to live in borderline poverty or give up their profession;

- recognition of the critical role often played by grandparents in supporting parents to work; and
- increased access to flexible working, particularly for low paid workers.''

At the Congress the RCM also passed a motion calling on the Scottish Government do much more to improve staff retention and better workforce planning. ENDS

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