

Description

Political Action and Protest – Midwifery in 2023

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Laura Godfrey Isaacs

How can we respond to what is a dire and worsening state of midwifery and maternity services in the UK? At times, I have been feeling hopeless and powerless in the face of what can be seen as an existential threat to the midwifery model, and to the very existence of the NHS itself. Finding a voice through collaborative protest has been a way to make an impact.

In the last few months, however, I have found solidarity and a way to take action by getting involved in some of the mass protests and strikes organised by a coalition of healthcare workers and unions; the first-ever strikes called by the RCN, unprecedented walk-outs instigated by junior doctors and the BMA, as well as grassroots movements such as Keep Our NHS Public and NHS Workers Say NO.

At the mass SOS NHS Demo in March, the RCM joined as a partner, and we collected a midwifery block of around 35 who marched together. In this way I have found a way to raise my voice and take collective action for midwifery.

I was asked to speak at two demos after posting pictures supporting striking nurses on the picket line, plus writing an article for NHS Workers Say NO.

> Often the media ignores midwives and other healthcare workers, grouping us together as ‘nurses and doctors’ so I felt it was important to provide a midwifery perspective.

This kind of speaking is distinctly different to talking at a conference or symposium, so I had to quickly adapt and highlight some key messages, whilst also enthusing the crowd.

We’re in a fight to keep midwifery and the NHS functional – and free – for the broad mass of people in this country. I encourage you to get involved, support healthcare unions, attend events, big-up other striking workers and take action such as writing to your MP and local councillors.

Solidarity and save our NHS!



Here are my speeches from the NHS Workers Say NO protest outside Downing Street in January 2023 and the #SOSNHSDEMO in March 2023.

Speech at the NHS Workers Say NO outside Downing Street – January 18, 2023

Hello, it's great to be here in solidarity with all healthcare workers, and for the public we care for.

I'm a community midwife, based at a London hospital.

This government doesn't care about mothers and babies.

This government doesn't care that maternity services are in crisis, and our midwives are broken.

39% of maternity units "require improvement" or are "inadequate", and record numbers of people are dissatisfied with their birth experience, according to the Care Quality Commission.

Around 30,000 people a year, documented by The Birth Trauma Association, suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder during their birth experience.

Countless investigations like The Ockenden Report detail the systemic failures that have led to unnecessary tragedy for families.

Recent MBRRACE reports find that we are still failing Black and ethnic minority women and people, who die disproportionally more in childbirth than their white counterparts. And suicide is still the leading cause of death for all women and birthing people in the perinatal period.

But this government still take no significant action. Our staff are crying out for help.

We are short of over 2000 midwives!

29 out of 30 student midwives, trained in the NHS, don't go into the profession but leave with a debt of over £40,000, and 55% consider leaving before they quality.

Over half of current midwives are considering leaving their job, with over 57% saying they intend to leave the NHS in the next year, according to a Royal College of Midwives.

We have a profession that is struggling with unacceptable workload, moral injury and burnout – unable to give the quality of care we want and need to give.

We are not earning a living wage.

There has been unacceptable pay restraint, and low pay awards for years in a profession of mostly women, who often have caring responsibilities at home on top of their jobs – in a country with the highest cost of childcare in the world, and a crippling cost of living crisis.

Midwives can't afford to live on their salary, particularly in London. Many are choosing to leave, take early retirement, or are going on long-term sickness as they are ground down by pandemic working, in addition to the current situation.

Those that are left are often working more hours than they want to, in an over-stretched and stressful environment, often on top of full-time work, picking up additional bank shifts to supplement their income.

Soon there will be no-one left.

Maternity care matters.

We look after families at one of the most fundamentally important moments of their lives. We want to provide excellent care, without losing our own wellbeing in the process.

But today's reality is of a maternity service that is inadequate, unsafe and damaging to mothers, babies, families and staff. This risks the health and wellbeing of those directly involved; the whole of society.

We are all born and 75% of women and those that can give birth have children. How we give birth, and how we start out in life effects our mental and physical health and wellbeing for the rest of our lives.

Our protest isn't just about pay. It's about the heart of what we do in the NHS – and we need to be properly funded to do that.

This government doesn't care about mothers and babies, but we do!

We challenge this government to step up to their responsibilities, to fund maternity services properly and pay midwives properly.

Thank you.



Speech at the SOS NHS Demo outside Downing Street – March 11, 2023

Hello, and thank you so much for being here – save our NHS!

I'm an NHS midwife

Midwives look after you at the beginning of your life, an event of enormous significance that fundamentally effects your health and the health of the mother or person giving birth.

Most other countries don't have our system of midwifery which cares for women and babies during pregnancy, labour and up to one month after birth – as well as looking after the whole family.

This is the foundation of the NHS – a comprehensive system that looks after people from the cradle to the grave.

This system is under threat as we face a maternity service that is crumbling, short of 2,000 midwives.
This system is under threat when basics such as reasonable pay and conditions aren't met.
This system is under threat when the NHS is being eroded by privatisation.

This government doesn't care about the damaging effect of inadequate maternity care on the lives of mothers and babies.
This government doesn't care that midwives are leaving the NHS in droves.
This government doesn't want a free comprehensive healthcare care system – (pause) they want to charge you. We already see this with vulnerable migrant women being charged for using maternity services and in many cases avoiding care when they need it as a result. This is a personal tragedy for them and a public health disaster.

We call on everyone to fight for the NHS so midwives like me can carry on caring for you and everyone at the start of their life.
We call on the Royal College of Midwives to carry on fighting for midwifery as a unique high-quality service, free at the point of delivery for everyone, regardless of whether they can pay.
We call on politicians to stop this healthcare crisis and reinvest in our NHS – previously the best in the world.

We care about mothers and babies, but this government doesn't. So show some solidarity and make some noise for the midwives!

Thank you for being here, save our NHS.

Category

1. Birth, Art & Culture

Tags

1. activism
2. midwifery
3. NHS

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