

Description

RCM Press Release: 14 June 2024

RCM calls for ‘right staff in the right place with the right education and training’ ahead of General Election

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) has today called on all political parties to commit to safer, well-resourced maternity services. The College says that the challenges faced in maternity care are well-documented, but, it argues, they are not insurmountable, if the next Government commits to ensuring services have the right staff in the right place with the right education and training.

Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the RCM, said:

“Every midwife and maternity support worker wants to be able to deliver the best and safest care to women and families. Unfortunately, too often and in too many of our Trusts and Health Boards there are too few staff, meaning care is spread too thinly. We know that staff shortages compromise safety. Those shortages also mean that there’s no time for staff to update their skills, and, just as importantly, to train alongside their obstetrician colleagues so that teams work well together. That’s why we need more midwives and MSWs – the right staff in the right place with the right education and training to deliver good, safe care.”

The College was swift to point out that it’s not simply the recruitment of new staff that’s important, but the retention of skilled and experienced staff within the NHS. While they welcomed the manifesto commitments from some of the political parties to tackle the workforce shortage within the NHS, it estimates that the NHS in England alone is 2,500 midwives short of what is required for every maternity service to be fully staffed. While there has been a welcome increase over the last Parliament in student numbers, there has, the RCM argues, been insufficient attention paid to the retaining existing staff. With a predominantly female workforce, there is little flexibility to allow for caring responsibilities, leaving some staff with no choice but to leave the profession, or to only offer bank shifts, which is significantly more expensive to the NHS. The RCM is calling on the next Parliament to think more creatively about working patterns within the NHS, and to dismantle the rigid 12-hour shift patterns that dominate maternity services.

Gill added:

“If you are a midwife or MSW who is caring for a child or a parent or even a partner, the current shift system does not work for you. We have to find a way of balancing the needs of those women and families accessing maternity services and the women, because they are almost all women, who work in them. We know there are some services that are really innovating in this area. We know it can be done. We want to work with the incoming Government to amplify this, to share good practice and to help create a service that values the staff that work there.”

Ensuring staff have the right skillsets is as important as the number of staff, the RCM has argued, as there is anincrease in women with more complex health needs accessing services. Perinatal mental health in particular needsgreater investment, with specialist midwives available in every service to provide the support women need.

> The College was swift to point out that it's not simply the recruitment of new staff that's important, but the retention of skilled and experienced staff within the NHS.

Gill continued:

"One of the biggest causes of maternal death during pregnancy and within a year of birth is suicide. That's both shocking and avoidable, if we have the right staff to provide the mental health support women need. Sadly, even when services have mental health specialist midwives, they get pulled into other areas – again, because there are simply too few staff available. Women deserve so much better than this, and it's within the gift of political parties to deliver it."

The RCM has been clear that not only is tackling maternity safety the right thing to do, it also makes financial sense. In its How to fix and improve maternity safety guide, published last month, the RCM reported that compensation payments related to incidents in maternity services rose to more than £1 billion in 2023, equivalent to a third of the total maternity budget. Numerous recent reports have been clear that staff shortages and a lack of access to multidisciplinary training are significant factors in failings in maternity safety. By investing in these areas, women will receive better care, staff will be more likely to stay within services and there will be long term financial savings for the NHS.

ENDS

Category

1. All4Maternity Blog
2. News & Views

Tags

1. midwifery services
2. RCM

Date Created
18th June 2024