Description

Standing Tall and Caring for Each Other: Maternity Care at The Royal Oldham Hospital

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The Red Cedar Tree was named as “The Tree of Life” by the indigenous tribes of British Columbia, the west coast province of Canada. It has been in existence for over 50 million years and predates human existence. It was alive when dinosaurs ruled the earth and lived through the great extinction. The trees have survived many major natural events such as earthquakes, tsunami’s, floods and droughts.

Indigenous people use these trees for many purposes such as for canoes, building their homes, fishing floats, tunics, mats, blankets, as well as nappies and fluffy towels. They make ropes that are so strong that they can haul 40 tonne whales with them, they use them to make medicines. They plant new-born babies’ placentas at the bases of the trees to ensure long healthy lives and at the end of their lives they make coffins as the wood is considered sacred.

The reason these trees are so amazing is not due to the great heights they achieve, not due to living for potentially 1000 years, not due to living through all these catastrophic disasters, or providing an ecosystem. It is due to the trees being so strong and standing tall for many years, even though their roots do not go deep into the ground. The trees have shallow roots, they spread them across to each other and intertwine like they are holding hands and hugging each other.

They gain their strength not from standing alone and proud but by being together and supporting each other, providing protection to each other from the elements and keeping each other strong as a collective.

The reason I present this analogy is that I can relate to this in my career as a midwife at the Royal Oldham Hospital, in England. I love my role – having the ability to provide care to women and their families at such a beautiful time in their lives. I feel privileged to be able to be part of their moments of hope, excitement, joy, determination, strength, power,

fear, worry and sometimes sadness. I've been a part of the 'Oldham Team' for seven years now and I haven't regretted the moment when I decided to join the Northern Care Alliance.

Spinning plates



I am now in a role that brings me great joy as a practice education midwife. Through this role I must spin multiple plates. I welcome new staff joining our team, develop existing staff through training and education, support international midwives making the long and tough journey of adapting to working and living in the UK and I support our student midwives as they embark on their future and hopefully stay with us for their future careers, I manage the preceptorship programme for newly qualified midwives and train our amazing team of maternity support workers who are the foundations of our department, enabling us to keep moving forward. I also enjoy remaining clinical in my role and can continue to care for women directly and passionately as part of our wonderful multidisciplinary team.

Part of my role involves delivering training to all disciplines with the help of our specialist midwives, neonatal consultants and advanced neonatal practitioners, and consultant obstetricians. Maternity care is broad and has offers many opportunities, some I never realised existed until I became a midwife myself.

Facing challenges

The impact of the global pandemic has resulted in a much more pressured service. We are now all familiar with the many reports published in the UK such as the MBRRACE Report, (MBRRACE-UK: Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK | MBRRACE-UK | NPEU (ox.ac.uk)) the Morecambe Bay investigation, (Morecambe Bay Investigation: Report – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)) the Ockenden report (First report of the independent review into maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust – Ockenden Maternity Review the East Kent report (Maternity and neonatal services in East Kent: 'Reading the signals' report – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)) , the CQC State of Care report (State of Care 2022/23 – Care Quality Commission (cqc.org.uk)) and now the investigation at Nottingham (This is the official website for the independent review of maternity services at the Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust – Ockenden Maternity Review). These directives highlight the inequalities in outcomes for childbearing women, people and their babies, staffing shortages and failings in maternity services in England. The impact of these reports has affected maternity staff and those we serve.

Compassion and civility



During the Covid-19 pandemic NHS staff were hailed as 'superheroes' with lifesaving abilities and placed on pedestals..but we are human beings with human needs! For this reason we have made great use of the SCARF (Safety, Caring, Achievement, Resilience, Friendship) support framework (SCARF Programme – Northern Care Alliance (leadershipbyall.co.uk)) to support our staff, and we have implemented training that incorporates the 'civility saves lives'(Home | Civility Saves Lives) campaign, as well as behaviour workshops influenced by Each Baby Counts

programme (ebc-2020-final-progress-report.pdf (rcog.org.uk)).

Many staff make sacrifices to keep mothers and babies safe. Without realising it at Oldham we behave very much like the great red cedar and provide support and care for one and other. There are hundreds of examples that go unnoticed and unseen by the women and families, of us behind the scenes supporting one another and picking up the emotional pieces in the background. I remember always being told that a midwife must be swan like with grace and beauty on the surface even though her feet are busy paddling underneath. I always found this analogy sad; those paddling feet didn't always receive the support and rest they needed.

So now I will continue to spread my roots like the great tree – in the background promoting acts of kindness to one another and showing compassion when someone is having a hard day. This is the backbone of our service, being able to lean on each other for support. I know my team are my work 'family' whatever profession they are. We flatten our hierarchy and provide little lifts to one another to enable us to be strong and provide a safe service.

Come and join our team at Oldham we welcome all to join in our forest like the Great Red Cedar Trees.

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