Description

The Great Migration: Journey of Two UK Midwives Seeking New Opportunities and Challenges in Australia

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From an article featured in June 2023 issue of The Practising Midwife, this is the full conversation between Olivia Hill and Lucy Gladwell, a UK and current Australian midwifery leader.

Introduction



Olivia Hill, Midwifery leader and Founder of Aulive

Midwifery is an international profession and many midwives make the decision to move away from the UK to live and work. I was one of them. I loved my job as an NHS midwife, I valued my professional autonomy, training and the expansive knowledge and wisdom of the birth workers surrounding me. However, I wanted to fulfil my life personally. In 2013, whilst avoiding ‘adulthood’, I moved to Australia.

My international midwifery journey started in private obstetric practice. It was bumpy. The practice didn’t align with my midwifery ethos and was very different from the previous roles that I had had as a midwife. I had a passion for home and physiological birth – quite the juxtaposition against a heavily obstetric system I found myself in. The scope and opportunity to apply my skills here were initially dramatically reduced.

It’s not all bad though, in fact I’m very thankful. After all, it was this very experience that helped me conceive my business – Aulive, so I could share what I had learned with others making the same transition. Many challenges are often only uncovered during the process of relocation, and such a huge process of change and transition to a new country and culture needs careful consideration.

I was (and still am) determined to support midwives who want to experience the Australian lifestyle, working within an organisation that still supported their career and development goals. I knew that one day I was going to offer healthcare professionals the opportunity to work in Australia.

Since then, I have been placing healthcare professionals across Australia. During that time, I’ve had the pleasure of mentoring Lucy Gladwell, a UK and current Australian midwifery leader. So, I thought that we would join forces, and provide you with an insight about what international midwifery can look like.

Our recent conversation might shed light on the experience of relocating to Australia…

Hi Lucy, what made you move to Australia?



Lucy Gladwell, UK and current Australian midwifery leader

I was fed up with the weather in the UK and found myself wishing time away before my next holiday.

I loved being a midwife in the NHS, but the shifts were long with huge workloads, minimal breaks and immense pressure. I felt I couldn’t give the best care and was feeling overwhelmed about the thought of working in these conditions for another 40+ years.

Australia was a country where my qualification would be recognised with no further study or exams, there was better weather, pay and opportunities. I moved on a temporary visa to try out the new lifestyle and never looked back.

Were you welcomed into the Australian health care system when you arrived? How did they welcome you?

Yes absolutely! The staff were really friendly and keen to help me out in any way they could. I didn't buy a car straight away and my colleagues would regularly offer me a lift home, especially when there was public transport delays or the weather was bad.

How did Aulive help you on your journey?

Olivia, the Founder of Aulive, was the first midwife that I met in Melbourne. She is now my mentor. Olivia was relatable and advised me about the different options for work based on my preferences. Over the years, she has advised me using her wealth of knowledge and network connections. She has an in-depth understanding of Melbourne and Sydney and their public/private midwifery practices. Since moving to Melbourne, I've worked various roles in midwifery education, improvement and project management. Navigating new roles and new hospital systems can be challenging, which is why it's so important to have strong midwifery leaders to turn to for advice and support when you need. Olivia has had a diverse and impressive midwifery career and has been a great soundboard as I've navigated my career path.

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What is the professional culture like?

It's more relaxed and the staff are very welcoming. There is no set uniform. Midwives wear vibrant coloured scrubs, including Christmas themed ones in December! There's flexibility with work arrangements with a focus on wellbeing and staff retention. Many hospitals are improving their rostering and other initiatives to improve job satisfaction.

How has your hospital supported your career growth and progression?

Having tertiary qualifications undoubtedly helps progress your career in Australia. I completed my Master's in Advanced Midwifery Practice in 2021 and was supported with paid study leave. I now receive a qualifications allowance on top of my salary.

For most of my midwifery career I have moved hospitals to progress, moving to where the opportunity is. I started working at a tertiary hospital recently. They have been very supportive in terms of growth and career progression. I have been on secondment for the past year completing their clinical fellowship program which builds capability in improvement, project management and leadership. I will soon be returning to the hospital as part of the leadership team.

Are you happier as a midwife now and why?

Yes, the work/life balance is much better. Most midwives work part-time which is achievable as the wages are higher. There is flexibility with shift patterns (eight or 12-hour shifts) and some flexibility around childcare. There is good work/life culture, with a common understanding that your health and family always come first. I get my breaks; you get financially compensated for missed meal breaks so there is more of a motive for management to ensure you get them.

Overtime is well compensated and the unions are strong, ensuring there are clear guidelines to what nurses and midwives are entitled to. They provide guidance for ratios which are manageable. For example, the postnatal ratios are one midwife to four antenatal or postnatal people on a day shift and six on a night shift.

What's life like for you outside of midwifery?

I love exploring new places with my husband. We go camping to lots of incredible campsites in Australia, these are often within two hours of Melbourne and very affordable. Even on these short breaks, it feels like we are away on holiday! I

also like to catch up with friends, go on long walks by the beach or try out new cafes.

What is the best thing about Melbourne?

There is so much to love about Melbourne! I love how you can see so many different landscapes within an hour or two of the city, from beaches and wineries to rainforests and mountains. It's also a foodie heaven with an amazing choice of cuisines from all over the world.

Final thoughts

These experiences show how valuable it can be to relocate but every midwife must make their own decision about what is right for them and their future. It is good to know that international midwifery offers such opportunities and the potential for professional and personal growth. **TPM**

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