

Description

The right decision

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A challenge

Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic student midwives in England have been asked to “opt-in” to spending up to 80% of their studies in clinical practice, to help the NHS fight against the deadly coronavirus. With the government advising the

non-essential keyworker population to remain inside and maintain social distancing, I realised that my status as a student midwife made compliance with this government guidance challenging, and I took to social media to raise awareness of the challenges facing student midwives. Social distancing as a student midwife is complicated by our duty to help mothers to position and attach their babies so that they can properly latch at the breast; hugging a weeping mother when she is told that her baby requires a trip to the neonatal unit; teaching the mother of a baby admitted to NICU to hand express for her tiny infant, holding a woman as she attempts to stand after fainting and performing observations on a lady that is developing an elevated temperature —something that 4-6 weeks ago could have been a sign of infection, but is now considered a COVID-19 symptom which necessitates isolation in a side room. Typically, 6-10 members of staff huddle in tiny offices for handovers, but now there are restrictions on how many people can be in the same room, and social distancing must be maintained even during handovers. There are face masks in the stock room with the word COVID written on the box they are stored in, this is real life and the effects of COVID-19 are being felt all over the world.

Part of the team



My final weeks on the postnatal ward following the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring the novel coronavirus a pandemic were tough, and although emotions ran high throughout the ward, we carried on. I loved helping women and families, but I also loved helping the team. I felt like part of the team and no longer just “the student”, but a confident and integral member of the team. Because without us, the overextended NHS would be a lot worse off.

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A decision to make

Since my final shift on the postnatal ward, we have been asked by the NMC to “opt-in” or “opt-out” of the extended practice placement I described earlier. It is a decision that none of my cohort have taken lightly. We had a week to decide if it was suitable for us and our families, and although the agonising decision-making process raised questions, doubts and emotions, our tutors were available to speak to us throughout that difficult time. Now that I have confirmed my decision to “opt-in” I feel more confident than ever in my dream to become a midwife.

What a feeling!



The drive to help women, families and fellow members of the midwifery team is an overwhelming feeling. Something I have never felt before. It overrode the feeling of fear, upset and anxiety felt by many and evoked feelings of love, passion and an innate determination to help. This drive has brought healthcare workers together. The NHS has lost consultants, doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and midwives to this virus but we remain determined. We care for the families in our care because no-one anticipated this viral outbreak or the subsequent lockdown prior to becoming pregnant. Women vocalise their desire to leave the unit as soon as possible after their appointments or after giving birth, because they feel safer in their homes as they can maintain social distancing from other women and healthcare professionals, in a bid to protect their babies and themselves form the terrible coronavirus.

Supporting each other

During this time, we are continuing to study from home via online lectures set by our university and we receive regular emails and phone calls from our tutors. Our cohort has been divided by the option to discontinue or remain in clinical practice. We have made our choices, but we remain supportive of those heading towards the front line or staying home to protect themselves or their loved ones. We regularly keep in touch and help to raise morale by sharing our experiences, so that we do not feel alone during this pandemic.

The right decision



As a nation, we are reassured that this will not last forever. Those affected by the virus will hopefully recover and those who have sadly lost loved ones will be able to give and receive physical comfort and consolation once again. I feel this experience has enhanced my practice and my confidence in my decision to become a midwife. I am proud of our cohort and other student midwives, student nurses and healthcare workers who have chosen to step up and provide support to the NHS during this pandemic and wish everyone well.

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