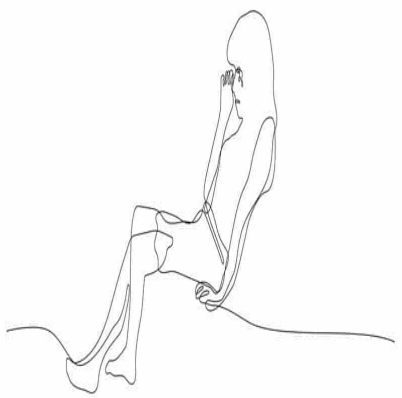

Description

The system and the struggle; a midwives apology

Alicia Walker – Midwife

After two very challenging 14 hour shifts, I slept for a solid 13 hours. When I woke up, I wasn't quite sure how to spend my day. The previous two days had been so emotionally draining that I felt binging on my favourite TV programme wasn't quite what I needed to restore my resilience. I had simply survived the days, not allowing myself to fully reflect. I think many of us use this as a defence mechanism. I think if we took a step back and properly looked at what we do for a living, day in, day out, it could very easily seem a bit too much.

The NHS is currently facing a crisis that needs to be addressed. Many of you will automatically think of the funding crisis when you hear this. But whilst our experiences are certainly linked to funding issues, it isn't the only issue. What I'm trying to emphasise can't be easily quantified into percentages and statistics. The major crisis I witness each day at work is the defeat and helplessness that so many of my colleagues in the NHS are feeling.



Regardless of the occasional scaremongering news headline, the simple fact of the matter is that staff care. We care about those in our care, their families, their lives. As a midwife in particular, I care so much about seeing women and their families growing as a unit. From that first booking appointment in the early weeks, through managing complications that may arise, offering support and empowerment through labour and encouraging their first steps in parenthood. This is why we came into these jobs. Not the glamour, not to eat cake, not to cuddle babies, but because we care.

No statistic in the world will be able to explain the reason why we work long shifts, for little money, missing our own families, and under impossible pressures. So for this reason, each time a woman complains about the promptness of our care, that we haven't completed their discharge quickly enough, or if we look over and see you struggling alone, not wanting to ask for help, it breaks our hearts. It breaks another fibre that drew us into this profession. Yes we may seem stressed, frustrated and irritated, but please know this is not because of the individuals in our care. It is because of a system, that has had to prioritise numbers and targets, over and above individual journeys.

I see my colleagues trying their best to fight against this blockade; missing their breaks, staying late to complete paperwork, following up on patients long after they have left our care. But I also see the effects this has on them personally. When you walk into the clean utility and see your colleague try to hide the tear that is falling from their cheek. When you notice your once-outgoing friend recoil into their shell. When you see your coordinator take a deep breath before looking at the handover sheet, wondering where to begin. We have all been there, and we all see it all too often.

But at the same time I am so proud. I am so proud of this workforce that chooses to go into work each day, knowing it may use almost all of their emotional and physical energy to survive it. I'm proud that we actively don't shy away from situations of bereavement, trauma and stress, in order to attempt to relieve the suffering of another, if only for a moment. I speak as a midwife, but I know I speak for every other health care professional, and indeed for so many public sector workers , and others.



So this is why, whilst laid in bed after two horrendous shifts, I wanted to empty my heart. Without the physical energy to leave my flat, I opened my laptop and wrote. And somehow my writing turned into a poem. An apology. An acknowledgement of the hard work people put in every single day to keep the country well. I never anticipated the effect this poem would have on others.

I always worried that I may be too sensitive for this job, that others always seemed to have everything together. But within 24 hours of posting it had been shared hundreds of times. And as I read the many comments, they were all messages of encouragement and strength, from one person to another. Encouraging them as a person, as a professional, as a friend. I have been so humbled to see how a few printed words, have managed to bring so many people together, so for that, I am so thankful to you all.

An apology

I apologise to you, bed 22.

I apologise because you're not a bed number, you are you.

You are a person with feelings, not just a medical condition.

You are a mum, growing a human, waiting to welcome your new addition.

But you are an inpatient, something is not right,

And I'm trying, while you are here, to help you win this fight.

Be it blood pressure, sickness, or a baby who won't behave,

I see you there, waiting patiently, trying to be brave.

But you're scared; I can see that, you're out of your depth,

That's where we come in, to protect, to treat, so you can catch your breath.

But we have other ladies, who also need our support,

In emergencies, in crises, not wanting their pregnancies cut short.

So in all this kerfuffle, you may slightly slip through the net,

But please know I'm thinking of you, wanting your needs to be met.

I know you're more than a bed number, more than part of the wheel, a small cog,

But with all this going on, our brains can mist over with fog.

I'm just trying to prioritise, from one scared family to another,

And in reality, no one can juggle this many balls, no one has that power.

I'm just one person; I am trying my best,

But it's not good enough, you shouldn't see our stress.

You should feel like an individual, not just a number,

Please know we don't think of you like that, It's just we are at risk of sinking under.

We came into this job to advocate, protect and care,

And instead the system is making you feel invisible, like you're not even there.

But when the day is over, and I go home at night,

I often call the ward, to make sure you are all right.

I hope the next midwife caring for you has a quieter shift,

So you can get the care you deserve, and ensure your needs aren't missed.

So once again, I apologise to you, bed 22,

Please know that I know, you're not just a bed number, you are you.

Category

1. News & Views

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