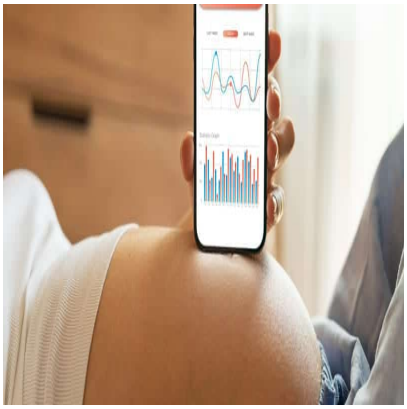


Description

Why We Need to Train all Midwives, Maternity Support Workers and Student Midwives in Digital Health

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Summary



Digital health in midwifery has become a reality. Government policy supports the use of tech to reduce the burden on the NHS and many of the public agree. So, where does that leave us, the maternity workforce? Aren't we already under enough pressure?

I'm convinced that the missing link is the right training and support. With this in place, we'll start to see the benefits tech can bring both to patients and to our own workloads – and those who love tech innovation will have opportunities to shine.

I'm a clinical advisor for ORCHA, the Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps.

Introduction

When I trained as a midwife, digital health was not part of the midwifery curriculum, nor was it something I would have considered would later be such an important and transformative part of my role as a midwife.

Then, when digital health started to emerge, I wasn't aware there were opportunities for clinicians like me to be

innovators or researchers in this space. I'm sure there will be others like me working in many different roles in maternity services who are also innovators at heart. As point-of-care clinicians, we often have the best ideas for solutions and produce the best products because we understand the real issues facing maternity services.

A critical thinker can consider whether a simple web-based app could help a woman and her maternity care providers manage a particular medical condition in pregnancy. In a fast-paced environment requiring critical decision-making skills, during labour for example, would a technology with artificial intelligence and machine learning be able to help us to make decisions based on a careful consideration of pathophysiology?

> Imagine if patient-specific data could feed into a precise moment in a woman's labour to predict her risk of complications. That would be really powerful for decision making, safety and quality of care.

I'm not suggesting for a second that technology could or should replace our clinical knowledge, expertise and professional intuition, just acknowledging that there is a real cognitive burden placed on the maternity workforce right now, and technology has the ability to relieve some of this unnecessary pressure in the system so we are supported to provide more time with the women and families we care for.

Apps to support the maternity pathway

With limited access to formal training available yet for frontline maternity staff, I largely found my own way to digital-health products through word-of-mouth and have recommended apps to women I've cared for which provide information and advice throughout the childbearing period, help with core-strength development, monitor blood pressure and support those with gestational diabetes or a predisposition to pre-eclampsia.

Baby Buddy by Best Beginnings, for example, should be a familiar app to many. Co-created with the Royal College of Midwives and accredited by the NHS, this app is already embedded in the maternity care pathways of 48 sites across the UK.

> Nourish, Squeezy, The Real Birth Workshop and Mush are all apps which achieve good quality assurance and data privacy scores on my ORCHA app library, so I know I can trust them.

These apps have proven effective at supporting patients, enhancing the service available from an over-stretched NHS. Ninety-nine per cent of parents using Baby Buddy say it has helped them take care of their children and 79% of users told Squeezy they'd experienced improvements in their bladder control. Meanwhile, Mush has partnered with NHS England with a mission to improve maternal mental health.

With digital health now a key feature of the NHS Long Term Plan and 65% of the public agreeing that new ways, including digital technology, should be introduced to help us all manage our health, [1] I can see the potential for significant change in the next five to 10 years.

So how do we address the issue of training now?

The approach to improving our digital capabilities must be multi-faceted and requires a sound evidence base on which to develop further research, education and training. Digital midwives across the NHS are in a particularly important position and have a powerful impact on raising awareness of digital health and innovation, as the average clinician will find it hard to keep abreast of all the advances in maternity care.

The Phillips Ives Nursing and Midwifery Review, launched in May 2022, will help to determine the needs of the nursing and midwifery workforce to deliver health care in the digital age during the next five, 10 and 20 years.

There's also a new CPD-accredited digital health academy, available on the Health Education England learning hub. It's designed to support the education of frontline healthcare professionals and all NHS and social care staff can access it for free https://learninghub.nhs.uk/Catalogue/ORCHA.

The academy is co-produced with NHS clinicians, for NHS clinicians. It uses accessible, bite-sized modules to help the NHS workforce meet their revalidation requirements and the core competencies of HEE's digital health competency

framework. The framework is a supportive tool to help all staff meet their digital potential.

> Fundamental change to the way we do things is always challenging but we are facing unprecedented demands on our ability to provide the best care, so it is necessary to fully exploit the potential of digital and other technologies.

In fact, I can only imagine what it will be like to train to be a midwife or maternity support worker in five to 10 years' time, when digital health is really embedded into the curriculum and technologies are routinely used in midwifery practice to support our clinical decision making.

For people born in 2022 and onwards, digital awareness will start from childhood. What we really need is to support this informal awareness with structured training which starts in schools and universities and then continues as a mandatory requirement throughout our entire careers. **TPM**

References

1. Digital Health in the UK: National attitudes and behaviour research, https://info.orchahealth.com/digital-health-attitudes-behaviours-2022-report. Published May 2022.

Category

1. All4Maternity Blog
2. News & Views

Tags

1. digital health
2. health apps

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