



Making of a midwife

Campaign ambassador Sally Sivas is clinical midwifery manager at Mayday Healthcare in Croydon. She talks about her work and how her family inspired her to choose a career in midwifery

MY GRANDMOTHER Catherine Tolland was just nine years old when she first helped to deliver a baby. Both she and my other grandmother Helen McLean were lay carers in the community of Anderston in Glasgow. Prior to the advent of the NHS, mothers had to pay for a doctor or midwife to visit and lay carers attended when a baby was born, or when someone died. My older sister Elizabeth, the first qualified nurse in our family, was a source of great pride to my parents and remains a powerful inspiration for my career as a nurse and midwife.

During my nurse training at Glasgow's Victoria Infirmary, I was allocated to the maternity department. I knew immediately that midwifery was the job for me. Watching a mother during the birth of her baby was the most exciting and amazing thing I had ever seen. The birth of a baby is still as exciting and amazing to me now as it was 20 years ago, because each mother's experience is unique.

When I qualified as a midwife in 1986, the lack of jobs in Scotland meant that I had to move south to Surrey. Since then, I have had a variety of clinical and management experiences including a secondment to the Royal London Hospital, where I learnt about the cultural aspects of childbirth and care.

Diverse experiences

Since 2001, I have been midwifery manager at Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust in Croydon. I am responsible for the delivery suite, the fetal assessment unit and midwife-led triage. The Croydon area is particularly diverse and offers a unique experience for midwives wishing to learn more about different ethnic cultures and the beliefs and practices surrounding pregnancy and birth. We have many women who wish to have a natural birth and our normal delivery rate is 70 per cent.

As a midwife supervisor I have a statutory professional duty to protect the public by ensuring high standards of midwifery practice. I help midwives to reflect on their practice and support them with their professional development.

Many aspects of midwifery are based on instinctive knowledge that grows with you as an individual as well as a professional. You must be prepared to develop and apply that knowledge in the clinical environment. Learning the art and



Paul Stuart

Sally Sivas (centre) enjoys the wider aspects of care that midwifery involves

science of midwifery is never completed, because every day there is something new to learn.

Being a midwife is not just about the delights of helping a mother during her pregnancy and birth; it is also concerned with the wider aspects of care, including areas such as child protection, assisting refugee mothers, planning care for deprived families or disabled mothers and advising teenagers who are facing parenthood. This is why so many different personalities can find satisfaction in the midwifery profession. We do not all have to be dynamic change agents or leaders to be good midwives, but we do have to be adaptable to the changing environment in which we work and to the different needs and expectations of women.

Personal qualities

A good midwife has courage, calmness and confidence: courage to take on new and exciting challenges with each situation, calmness to influence the mother, her partner and your work colleagues, and confidence in your midwifery

knowledge, skills and approach. A midwife can use her communication skills to accurately assess a situation and inspire a mother with confidence.

Most importantly, nothing is more satisfying than seeing a mother who may have experienced a difficult birth still smiling because of her achievement, especially if she has been helped along by the efforts of her midwife.

The patient experience is at the heart of all care. In midwifery, the woman is at the heart of care. But I also believe that care for carers is also essential. This means understanding when staff have personal difficulties that affect their ability to perform. Helping staff to work flexibly can enhance their quality of life and allows them to focus fully while at work.

I have the perfect job, because I focus not just on the immediate practice of midwifery but also on the strategic future of Mayday Hospital's maternity services. If you are interested in a job that changes your view of life, changes your view of yourself and may have a fantastic impact on others, midwifery may be the answer

So many different personalities can find satisfaction in the midwifery profession