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<http://www.nationalhealthexecutive.com/Comment/midwives-will-always-have-a-voice-at-the-nmc>

Midwives will always have a voice at the NMC

Donna Ockenden, senior midwifery advisor to the chief executive of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), discusses the changing representation of midwives at the regulator.

As midwifery advisor to the NMC and also a registered midwife, I understand that this may feel like an uncertain time for some midwives. The midwifery profession is going through a period of historic change. Changes to the NMC's legislation are due to be introduced in the spring, which will mean the end of statutory supervision along with the removal of the NMC's Midwifery Committee. In addition, the NMC has embarked on a radical programme of change for education, which will mean new standards of proficiency for the future graduate registered midwife.

It is my role to provide midwifery advice to the NMC, but also to ensure that the voice of the midwife is heard throughout the organisation. I passionately believe that the only way to do this effectively is through two-way communication, and I want to hear directly from as many midwives as possible about what matters to them.

One of the ways I am doing this is to personally visit maternity services across the four countries of the UK on behalf of the NMC to better understand the challenges that midwives face on a day-to-day basis and to listen to what midwives have to say about how their profession is evolving. As part of this work, I recently travelled to the maternity unit at Portsmouth's Queen Alexandra Hospital where I spent a 12-hour shift shadowing and listening to the midwives and student midwives working there. This gave me the opportunity to see and hear first-hand from midwives and student midwives about the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Throughout the shift I took part in a safety 'huddle', observed multidisciplinary handovers and care delivery, supported the care provided to a number of postnatal mothers and walked 16,000 steps.

My day in Portsmouth provided me with a really valuable opportunity to receive feedback directly from midwives and student midwives about their views on the changes and challenges to the midwifery profession. This is all vital information that, as promised, I have already taken back and shared with the NMC. Being a midwife is both a challenging and hugely rewarding job. The shifts can be long and the work is both physically and emotionally taxing. But it is clear the work that midwives at Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust and at midwifery units across the four countries – are doing is immensely appreciated by the women and families they care for, the communities they serve and the wider healthcare system in which they deliver care.

A very significant way that the NMC is continuing to ensure that the voice of midwives is heard is through the Midwifery Panel. The Panel was introduced by the NMC chief executive, Jackie Smith, to provide the regulator with high-level advice on key midwifery issues throughout this period of change for the profession. It also provides a forum for midwifery leaders to develop strategic thinking on the NMC's future approach to midwifery regulation.

Members of the Midwifery Panel include the chief nursing officers from the four countries of the UK, representation from the Royal College of Midwives and other leading figures from the world of maternity care including Dr Bill Kirkup, who led the review into maternity failings at Morecambe Bay. Collectively, the Panel has a vast amount of experience and knowledge and is determined to ensure that the voice of the midwifery profession is clearly articulated in the work that the NMC does going forward.

I know that some midwives were extremely disappointed by the decision to remove the function of statutory supervision, but it is important to know that work is already progressing to establish a new

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model of supervision, no longer linked to regulation. This new model will be very important in helping to ensure that midwives retain those elements of supervision which they value most. In addition to the important changes to legislation, the NMC is also embarking on an exciting programme of change for midwifery education. As part of this work, Professor Mary Renfrew, midwife and leading academic from the University of Dundee, will be leading on the development of new standards of proficiency for the future graduate-registered midwife.

Over the coming months, there will be lots of opportunities for midwives to be involved in this and other work being undertaken by the NMC. The regulator will be holding focus groups, listening events and stakeholder workshops, many held within the workplace, to enable midwives at all levels to contribute to (and remain informed about) the changes ahead. Midwives have told us that it is important that these events are held in the workplace where they are located. The NMC has listened to this as we plan more 'shadow' opportunities similar to the Portsmouth visit, that we have received such positive feedback on.

As a registered midwife, I feel confident about the journey ahead and look forward to engaging with fellow midwifery colleagues, women, their families and our multi-professional maternity colleagues as together we shape the future of the midwifery profession.

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