

- To:
- Regional medical directors
 - Trust medical directors
 - Regional HR directors
 - Trust HR directors
 - Regional chief midwives
 - Trust chief midwives
 - Regional chief nurse
 - Trust chief nurses
 - Local Maternity Systems

NHS England and NHS Improvement
Skipton House
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

14 April 2022

- cc.
- The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
 - The Royal College of Midwives
 - Trust maternity and neonatal safety champions

Dear Colleagues

Language related to birth

There have been a number of concerns raised about the language used in some NHS trust maternity service job adverts and materials – phrases that suggest bias toward one mode of birth.

The NHS has a duty to provide safe and personalised care to women and families according to best practice guidance informed by evidence and the changes that are taking place in society, midwifery, maternity, and neonatal care services. It is a fundamental requirement of a maternity multi-disciplinary team to inform and listen to every woman, respect their views and help them to try and achieve the type of birth they aspire to.

A process of informed decision-making about birth should be based on dialogue between the clinician and the woman about the material risks and the benefits of all of the available options (including the option of no treatment). The centrality of women's decision making has also been highlighted in the recent Ockenden final report¹.

In light of this, we want to remind NHS trusts and maternity services of the importance of ensuring that language is consistent with women receiving the necessary information

¹ [Final report of the Ockenden review - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108111/final-report-of-the-ockenden-review.pdf)

and support to make informed decisions about their care, in line with the ethos of Better Births, the report of the National Maternity Review. We also recently wrote to maternity services asking them to stop using total caesarean section rates as a means of performance management.

We know that the Royal College of Midwives has commissioned the *Re:Birth Project* due to be published later this year. This project is an open collaborative process, working with maternity staff, service users and others supporting pregnancy and birth, to build consensus about the names we call different types of birth in the UK. The NHS aims to review the outcomes of the project and its recommendations, with a view to supporting maternity organisations in England to use agreed language.

Ahead of the publication of this work, NHS trusts and Local Maternity Systems are asked to review the language that they are using about their services, in job adverts, and any other information designed to support decision-making on pregnancy and birth choices. This information should be based on NICE guidance and the best available evidence and materials.

Thank you for all you are doing to ensure the NHS remains one of the safest places in the world to give birth and continues to improve.

Yours faithfully



Dr Matthew Jolly

National Clinical Director for Maternity
and Women's Health

National Maternity Safety Champion



Prof Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE

Chief Midwifery Officer

National Maternity Safety Champion