



UWL recognises Donna Ockenden

The University of West London (UWL) is delighted to recognise the achievements of UK maternity services and maternity safety expert Donna Ockenden with an honorary Doctor of Letters. She is an impressive advocate for high quality patient care and her work is a blueprint for excellence in the maternity sector.

With over 30 years' experience in healthcare, Donna has played a key role in developing midwifery both in the UK and abroad. No stranger to being part of the news headlines, Donna is currently chairing the independent review into Maternity Services at the Nottingham University Hospitals Trust (NUH). This inquiry, which is set to be the UK's largest ever review of its kind, is set to examine the cases of 1,700 families.

"Donna is proud to have extensive experience of working positively with multidisciplinary teams including hospital teams, GPs, commissioners and service users to introduce sustainable and lasting change," UWL Senior Lecturer in Midwifery Dr Julie Jones said. "This continues with her tireless campaigning for inclusion within the Nottingham review to ensure that not only is the team she works with diverse in nature but also that all voices are heard from the local community."

She was recently appointed a patron of MASIC UK - a charity supporting mothers injured in childbirth - and previously chaired the independent review into maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, producing the Ockenden Report in March 2022.

"Donna is committed to compassion and excellence in bereavement care," Dr Jones added. "Her tireless support for bereaved parents is reflected in her position as Honorary President of Baby Lifeline charity and in 2022 was appointed as an Ambassador for the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society."

Alongside Donna and her family as she accepted her honorary degree, were two women – Sian and Zoe, who are the sisters of Gina, a baby who was unable to survive the poor standard of maternity care her mother received during labour, some 31 years ago. Supporting the family so early in her professional life inspired Donna to make a highly significant promise to Gina, as she explained.

"I promised her that no matter how short or how long my career would be in midwifery and maternity services, I would dedicate every day to making maternity care safer, so that babies like Gina would not die in the way she had," she said. "This was my 'Gina promise' and over the last 31 years, I have tried, every day to make maternity care safer and to keep my promise I made to Gina."

Donna has indeed been instrumental in introducing support for both families and professionals facing pregnancy loss and stillbirth, including the maternity bereavement toolkit. Launched in 2017 in partnership with SANDS, the NHS England Patient Experience and Insight team and the London Maternity Bereavement Midwives Forum, the toolkit draws on in-depth feedback from women and their families about what helped them and what was important to them.

“To Gina, who I know is looking down on us today, the biggest thank you of all, you made me the midwife I am,” Donna concluded. “Today’s award is another step forward in maintaining my commitment to my Gina promise.”

ENDS

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