

Jane Kelly isn't a midwife. She's a witness to the care her daughters-in-law received in today's NHS. Here are her thoughts.

Times have changed... *for the worse*

‘Obstetrics have advanced in so many admirable ways... But one area where we've taken a backwards step is the grassroots day-to-day care of the people we're supposed to be looking after.’ These were the words of a midwife, who after 28 years has left the profession. It was the sentiments of this letter to *Midwives* that prompted me to contribute, as the concerns voiced are close to my heart and do not seem to be improving.

My two daughters-in-law have had three babies in two years. One lives in North London where the care before, during and after birth, was excellent. She had valuable visits from a known midwife, one specifically for breastfeeding, which lasted well over an hour. Twelve months later, she is still breastfeeding. However, the mother who gave birth in an area of South London was less fortunate. Her care on the labour ward was very good for both births, after care for her in the hospital, and in the community for both, was not.

She was on a crowded ward where we had to ask for help. She was sent home before her baby and had no visit from a midwife, until I telephoned and requested it. The baby was in the special care baby unit and the mother had been forgotten – despite a difficult birth.

With baby number two, she was sent home after ten hours – on a very quiet ward, no one attended her for the first six hours. She asked for help breastfeeding, but there seemed to be a notion that with a second baby, she could manage. She had one brief visit from an unfamiliar midwife because it was the holiday period. Again, she had no help with breastfeeding. With so much pressure for mothers to breastfeed, why does there seem to be so little professional assistance?

I decided to write to interested bodies. The RCM answered my letter quickly agreeing with my views. The Department of Health sent a proforma reply stating: ‘On 8 March... ministers had agreed... in England,

there would be no reduction in midwifery training places during 2011/12. The NHS has a record number of midwives in place and the planned training of midwives will continue at the same number as last year.’ The department tell me that ‘the number of midwives has increased. For 2011/12 there will be a total of 2490 places available’. I understand there is a shortage of at least 5000. My MP, and the one local to the South London area, failed to respond. Except for the RCM, I feel that I am being dismissed as a busybody.

Not only do I feel that the amount of professional care has decreased since I had my own children, but other forms of support too. My stays in hospital were longer; it was the old-fashioned state enrolled nurses who were most available at feeding times. I was encouraged to remain in the local cottage hospital until the baby was feeding happily. I know times have changed, but families live further apart, grandparents and older friends work, so this support isn't just a street or a town away. My daughter-in-law has resorted to the internet for help. I wonder if levels of postnatal depression have increased too?

As a lay person, I am confused by the government's promises of help and the apparent lack of resources to carry out these plans. M



To read the letter in full, please visit: www.rcm.org.uk/midwives/your-views/feedback-december-2010



RCM COMMUNITIES
Are midwives failing women in the postnatal period? To join the discussion, visit: <http://communities.rcm.org.uk>

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