Royal College of Midwives

Position statement

raising concerns

The Royal College of Midwives position

The RCM believes that all staff in maternity should feel able to speak out if they have concerns about the quality and standard of care provided, if they suspect treatment or care will or has caused harm, or if they see cultures and behaviours that put colleagues or women at risk.

Recommendations

- Everyone has a responsibility to create an environment where concerns can be raised without fear or favour. This starts with chief executives and flows down through leaders and managers to clinical teams.
- Through its organsing and engagement activities, the RCM often gains insights into professional culture, clinical developments and practice issues within organisations.
- Each organisation should have an executive director with responsibility for Freedom to Speak up, together with a Speak Up Guardian and network of champions (Raising Concerns Champion Northern Ireland)
- Midwives should be aware of their responsibilities under the NMC Code. MSWs, although not a regulated profession, have a voluntary code of conduct and an equal responsibility to raise concerns.
- Open and transparent reporting is fundamental to improving health outcomes and workplace behaviours and culture. Accordingly, healthcare professionals should, at all times, be open and honest with patients, service users, colleagues and those undertaking statutory responsibilities.

Background and context

It is undeniable that over the years there have been too many incidents where health services have failed, often because those who could see what was going wrong did not speak up.

From Mid-Staffs to Morecambe Bay and more recently Shrewsbury and Telford, these reports have thrown a spotlight on the way that concerns about standards, systems and practice are raised and dealt with across the NHS. The 2020 interim Ockenden report, together with previous reports, has highlighted the need for consistent and transparent processes when escalating and acting upon safety concerns raised by maternity staff. The RCM has updated its guidance Standing Up for High Standards which outlines how we will support midwives, student midwives and maternity support workers (MSWs)'s if they have concerns at work.

We will:

- Support and encourage members to use existing mechanisms within their employing organisations to raise issues confidently rather than anonymously.
- Provide guidance for members who wish to raise concerns.
- Promote good working relations and lines of communication between midwife managers and RCM workplace representatives so that issues are raised in a climate of honesty and transparency.
- Facilitate forums for midwife managers, supervisors of midwives (Northern Ireland and Scotland,) and clinical supervisors for midwives (Wales) professional midwifery advocates (England) and RCM workplace representatives to share with others views, evidence and perceptions about their working environment.
- Direct concerns brought to our attention to the most appropriate office holder and escalate if required.

The RCM believes that our members go to work to do a good job and to provide a high standard of care. We recognise, however, that there are huge pressures on midwives, MSWs and student midwives which may have an impact on safety, quality, compassion or standards of care. We have a responsibility to promote positive workplace cultures. The RCM/Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' (RCOG's) workplace behaviours joint statement and toolkit were updated in June 2021.

RCM workplace representatives and full time officers will support individuals and groups of members to make use of the right channels for raising concerns. We will often be involved in advising and supporting maternity managers. We are not an inspectorate and do not have authority to investigate. However, where a concern is raised about quality or safety, we will work with members to help to resolve them or to escalate them to the Head or Director of Midwifery, Director of Nursing/Chief Executive or possibly externally to the Regional Chief Midwife.

Where you have raised concerns that have not been heard, you may need to make use of your local whistleblowing policy. If you are considering this we strongly advise you contact your local RCM representative for advice and support.

where a concern is raised about quality or safety, we will work with members to help to resolve them or to escalate them

Endnotes

1. Standing up for high standards RCM (2014 updated 2022)
   www.rcm.org.uk/safetyinservices
2. The Code: professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates (2015 updated 2018)
   www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/
3. Raising concerns, guidance for nurses and midwives (2013 updated in 2019)
   www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/blocks/media-block/raising-concerns-v2.pdf
4. NMC guidance on the professional Duty of Candour
   www.nmc.org.uk/standards/guidance/the-professional-duty-of-candour/
5. Freedom to speak up: raising concerns (whistleblowing) policy for the NHS
   www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/whistleblowing/freedom-to-speak-up-whistleblowing-policy-for-the-nhs/
6. Guidance for boards on freedom to speak up in NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts (2019)
   www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/whistleblowing/freedom-to-speak-up-guidance-for-nhs-trust-and-nhs-foundation-trust-boards/
7. Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (2013). Francis Report
   UK Government publication - The mid Staffordshire NHS foundation trust public inquiry
8. Ockenden maternity review (2020). Ockenden Report. Emerging findings and recommendations from the independent review of maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford hospital NHS trust
   www.donnaockenden.com/downloads/news/2020/12/ockenden-report.pdf
9. The Report of the Morecambe Bay investigation Kirkup (2015)
   www.gov.uk/government/publications/morecambe-bay-investigation-report
10. Review of maternity services at the former Cwm Taf University Health Board 2019
    www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/review-of-maternity-services-at-cwm-taf-health-board_0.pdf
11. RCOG and RCM joint statement on undermining and bullying in the workplace updated June 2021
    www.rcog.org.uk/en/careers-training/workplace-workforce-issues/workplace-behaviour/joint-statement-undermining-bullying/

Position Statement: Raising Concerns

Published: February 2014
Updated: February 2022

Follow us on:

@MidwivesRCM

www.facebook.com/MidwivesRCM

@midwives_rcm

The Royal College of Midwives
10–18 Union Street
London SE1 1SZ

0300 303 0444
info@rcm.org.uk
www.rcm.org.uk