



POSITION STATEMENT

RAISING CONCERNS



The Royal College of
Midwives

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RCM POSITION



The RCM believes that all midwives, student midwives and maternity support workers (MSWs) should feel able to speak out if they have any concerns about the quality and standards of care provided or if they suspect treatment or care will or has caused harm. The RCM will support members if they have concerns at work.

The RCM supports the need for the NHS to develop a culture of safety and learning in which those who raise concerns about unsafe or poor care can do so without fearing the consequences. There should be a culture of openness with greater accountability and a relentless focus on safety. Staff in the NHS should never be stopped from raising concerns about patient safety. Staff should be supported and protected when they raise concerns. The RCM welcomes the government's report *Learning not Blaming* published on 16th July 2015 which states NHS England will produce guidance on how to implement the principles and actions in the *Freedom to Speak Up* report. This includes the introduction of Freedom to Speak up Guardians in every NHS trust.

Midwives and nurses must abide by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) code of conduct, midwives rules, standards and other NMC guidance. MSWs although not a regulated profession, also have a voluntary code of conduct and a responsibility to raise concerns.

The RCM agrees that healthcare professionals are encouraged to be open and honest with patients, service users, colleagues and those undertaking statutory responsibilities. We encourage open and transparent reporting in order to improve health outcomes in the NHS. We expect to see a management culture in the NHS where those who shed light on wrong doing do not fear for their careers.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The exposure of shortcomings in *The Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry* (Francis, February 2013) has thrown a spot light on the way that concerns about standards, systems and practice are raised and dealt with in the NHS.

In March 2015 *The Report of the Morecambe Bay Investigation* led by Dr Bill Kirkup highlighted serious failings in the Furness General Hospital maternity unit between 2004-2012. The high profile given to both reports means a new approach is required throughout the NHS to support staff and students who wish to raise concerns.

The RCM has produced the guidance *Standing Up for High Standards* which outlines how we will support midwives, student midwives and MSWs if they have concerns at work.



We will:

- Support and encourage members to use existing mechanisms within their employing organisations to raise issues.
- Provide guidance to support 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 (SoMs) 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.

It is clear from both the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry and the *Report of the Morecambe Bay Investigation* that a culture free from bullying and undermining behaviours is crucial if staff wish to raise concerns. The RCM recognises its responsibility to promote a positive workplace culture and we have worked with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) producing a joint statement and toolkit to help staff to address undermining behaviours and improve workplace behaviours in maternity services.

In June 2015 the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and General Medical Council (GMC) published joint guidance on the professional duty of candour. Developed in collaboration the professional duty of candour builds on the standards in the NMC Code and GMC *Good Medical Practice*.

Midwives, nurses and doctors should know what is expected of them when things go wrong, and should have the support of an open and honest working environment, according to the new guidance. It adds that patients should also expect a face-to-face explanation and apology from doctors, midwives and nurses, and it aims to help patients and service users understand what to expect from healthcare professionals.

REFERENCES

Standing up for High Standards RCM (2014 updated 2015) <https://www.rcm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Standing%20up%20for%20High%20Standards.pdf>

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GMC Good Medical Practice <http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/>



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