

RCM Briefing - Report of the TUC Black Workers' Conference

April 2016



From 15th-17th April 2016 the RCM attended the annual TUC Black Workers' Conference for the first time.

The RCM delegation joined BME trade unionists from across the TUC's affiliated unions to debate motions of importance to black workers. The conference was thought provoking, engaging and inspiring and as usual the RCM was made to feel very welcome.

The RCM delegation

was made up of five RCM members/staff including:

- Amy Leversidge, RCM Employment Relations Advisor;
- Lorna Daley, RCM Workplace Rep;
- Janet Fyle, RCM Professional Advisor;
- Francine Allen, RCM Regional Officer; and
- Karen Constantine, Regional Head South.

Frances O'Grady, the TUC General Secretary, opened the conference with a speech highlighting the importance of EU membership in maintaining employment protections, particularly in terms of equality issues.



The RCM Delegation to the TUC Black Workers Conference

We spoke four times at the conference, to put forward our motion to conference, about fair treatment for BME midwives, to speak in support of two motions and to contribute to the debate on another motion explaining why we intended to abstain from the vote.



Janet Fyle addressing the Conference

Janet Fyle, RCM Professional Advisor, spoke to the Conference first on a motion put forward by the Musicians Union about the Prevent Duty. The motion called for training and guidance for professionals to help them understand their responsibilities and abide with the duty which we fully supported. However, the motion also called for the TUC to lobby Government to repeal the Prevent duty which we didn't feel comfortable with. Janet explained to the conference that while we understand the controversies around the Prevent duty we feel that reporting duties have their place in safeguarding and protecting women in midwives' care. We felt it would be better to improve

the Prevent duty to manage the controversies rather than repealing the whole duty.



Lorna Daley addressing the Conference

Next, we put forward our motion to conference which was about the fair treatment of BME midwives. Our motion said:

“The Royal College of Midwives is calling on Black Worker’s Conference to campaign for the fair and equitable treatment of black and minority ethnic (BME) midwives working in the NHS. The RCM conducted a freedom of information request into maternity units in London and found that over the past five years BME midwives were disproportionately more likely to be subject to disciplinary proceedings. 44.1% of the midwives employed in London were BME compared to 66.4% of the midwives subject to

disciplinary proceedings who were BME. Worryingly, during the five year period there were 38 midwives dismissed and 37 were from a BME background. Sometimes mistakes and errors occur which may lead to a disciplinary proceeding however, these must be fair and equitable. BME midwives and maternity support workers deliver excellent services for women and their families and there is a tremendous amount of work done to promote woman-centred care, to improve safety, to give a greater choice of place and type of birth. BME staff should be valued for their hard work. The Black Worker’s Conference calls on the General Council to campaign for fair and equitable treatment of BME midwives working in the NHS.”



Lorna Daley with Ava (NASUWT)

Lorna Daley, our Workplace Representative, put forward the motion to conference. Lorna highlighted the findings of our new report: [‘BME Midwives, Disciplinary Proceedings and the Workplace Race Equality Standard’](#) which we published to coincide with the conference.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy supported our motion and spoke about the value of midwives and why midwives should be treated fairly at work. The CSP highlighted that there are similar issues across different professionals in the NHS. We were then overwhelmed by the numbers of speakers that gave speeches to support our motion. Unite, Unison, the RMT, NASUWT and the FBU all gave speeches calling for BME

midwives to be valued and highlighting similar issues in their professions. The most moving speech came from a NASUWT delegate, Ava, who told the conference that midwives need to be treated fairly because they do such a valuable job. She then bravely told the conference the reason she knew the value of midwives was because she had recently had experience of a bereavement midwife as her daughter had a still born baby. It was a very emotional speech, and understandably, Ava was crying as she told her story. Lorna then ran back up to the stage, put her arm around Ava and gave her the support she needed to continue, demonstrating there and then the care and support that midwives give women and their families. Our motion was voted for unanimously.



Delegates voting unanimously for our motion



Francine Allen addressing the Conference

Next, it was our turn to support the CSP, and Francine Allen spoke in support of their motion about the impact of student fees on the diversity of students. Francine explained that the RCM is opposed to the introduction of student fees and removal of the bursary for midwives, nurses and physiotherapists. Francine highlighted that we had tried to do research into the diversity of those applying for midwifery courses but universities do not keep statistics of unsuccessful applicants. We said that this must change if we are to understand the full impact of the Government's plans (if they are

successful). The motion was passed unanimously.

Janet Fyle then spoke in support of Prospect's motion calling for work to be undertaken to improve the representation of BME workers in leadership positions. Janet told the conference about the RCM's work with the Mary Seacole Award. The motion passed unanimously.

The RCM delegation really enjoyed our experience at the TUC Black Workers' Conference. The conference itself was incredibly thought provoking with some real debate over the issues. We were really pleased with the amount of support we received for our motion; it was truly touching, particularly the support from Ava. We had many delegates come up and say how pleased they were to see us at the conference and a surprising number tell us that their mum is a midwife and was also pleased to hear we were at the conference!



Francine, Amy, Ava, Lorna and Karen

Lorna Daley, RCM Workplace Representative said:

"The conference was an amazing three days of meeting with passionate trade unionists who are at the forefront of supporting and uplifting workers. It was an amazing mix of people from all walks of life with one goal 'fair and unbiased treatment for all'. The conference ranged from passionate speeches, songs and poetry to support motions and awareness of social injustice and inequalities not only at home, but also abroad. I felt immensely proud to be representing the RCM. We were seen as a trade union not just a professional body. I was also very nervous at the prospect of delivering the first ever motion by the RCM, 'Fair treatment for BME Midwives'. The audience were lovely and I got a round of applause. Our motion was supported by amazing women who spoke with such emotion, feeling and empathy for the midwives. It also came across that this unfair treatment was across every sphere and strata of society. This ranged from working as a teacher to acting. We also supported two other motions and made ourselves known as the 'new kids on the block'. I received amazing support from Amy, Francine, Janet and Karen. Would I do it again? YES."

If you have any questions about the TUC Black Workers' Conference please contact Amy.Leversidge@rcm.org.uk.