Royal College of Midwives manifesto

UK General Election 2017

On 8th June, voters will elect 650 Members of Parliament to represent them in the House of Commons. They will make big decisions about the future of the country, including the future direction of the National Health Service.

In this manifesto, the Royal College of Midwives sets out the "asks" that it is making of the candidates standing for election in constituencies up and down the country. These are our priorities for the years ahead. We invite candidates to sign up to support them.

Candidates are welcome to contact the RCM at election@rcm.org.uk at any time during the campaign with any questions or queries they may have about maternity services. We will do our best to help.

As always, the RCM remains neutral in party politics. We work across the political spectrum and look forward to meeting and speaking with many of the candidates who are successfully elected to Parliament.

Sign up to support the 5 RCM “asks”: www.rcm.org.uk/ukelection2017
Women have better outcomes and a better experience of maternity care when there is continuity in the midwives they see, and when they have choice and control over the care they receive.

Having too few midwives not only makes it harder to achieve this, it can potentially undermine the safety of care too. This is being increasingly recognised, with moves across Britain towards mandated safe staffing levels in the delivery of healthcare.

Improving choice, quality and safety requires proper investment in the NHS. But the NHS is facing intense budgetary pressures, with budgets rising by around 1 per cent per year, compared to an average over the lifetime of the NHS of around 4 per cent.

Care in the postnatal period is often the first area to suffer when a maternity service is struggling with a budget shortfall. But too few resources spent here can mean, for example, a woman may not be identified as needing referral to specialist maternal mental health services.

THE RCM IS ASKING PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IF THEY SUPPORT GIVING NHS MATERNITY SERVICES THE FUNDS THEY NEED TO ENSURE NEWBORNS GET THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN LIFE AND THAT WOMEN RECEIVE THE SAFEST, HIGHEST QUALITY CARE POSSIBLE.
Maternity services are the perfect place to help women and families give their newborn babies the best possible start in life.

If midwives have the time to encourage women to breastfeed, for example, it will help the mother give the child the best nutritional start. That is good for the baby, the mother, the family and society as a whole.

Pregnancy can also provide an opportunity to encourage any woman who smokes to quit (in December 2016, 12 per cent of women were smokers at their first antenatal appointment) or get women to be more active (in December, 20 per cent of women were recorded as obese at their first appointment). Intervention at this moment can deliver real dividends over the long term.

THE RCM IS ASKING PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IF THEY SUPPORT EXTRA RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES, INCLUDING THOSE THAT SPECIFICALLY APPLY TO PREGNANCY AND THE POSTNATAL PERIOD.
The NHS in England is short of around 3,500 midwives. Despite this, the number of NHS midwives in England rose by just 79 over the last year – that is less than half an extra midwife per maternity unit.

With one in three midwives in England now in their fifties or sixties, this shortage will soon get much worse.

At the last count, the number of births in England was rising, and is over 100,000 higher than in 2001. The complexity of their work is growing too, with many more births to older women, for example, who typically require more care. All this means that more is being demanded of midwives who struggle to cope given they are so massively short-staffed.

All the improvements in the quality and safety of maternity care is dependent upon eliminating the chronic national shortage of midwives. The Government must sort this out, and not just wearily accept it – shortages have consequences.

THE RCM IS ASKING PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IF THEY AGREE THAT THE NATIONAL MIDWIFERY SHORTAGE SHOULD BE ELIMINATED AND WHETHER, IF ELECTED, THEY WILL SPEAK UP FOR THE NEED FOR MORE MIDWIVES.

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There were over 1,300 midwives working in the NHS in England in December 2016 who were known to be nationals of other EU member states.

Midwives are not required to provide this information to the NHS, so the true number will be even higher. We are lucky to have them.

The RCM believes that the Government should act immediately to secure the right of these midwives to remain in the UK post-Brexit, regardless of the wider settlement for EU nationals living in the UK.

We also believe that the door should remain open for suitably qualified midwives to come to the UK to work in the NHS in the future.

THE RCM IS ASKING PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IF THEY SUPPORT GIVING MIDWIVES FROM OTHER EU COUNTRIES WHO ARE WORKING IN THE NHS THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN THE UK POST-BREXIT, AND WHETHER THEY SUPPORT THE IDEA OF ALLOWING MIDWIVES BEING ABLE TO COME TO THE UK TO WORK IN THE NHS IN THE FUTURE.

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Prices are rising far faster than the pay of midwives, maternity support workers and other NHS staff. If their pay had risen at the rate of inflation since 2010, midwives would today earn £6,000 more than they actually do.

In a recent survey of midwives who had left the NHS or were thinking about it, 80 per cent said that higher pay would keep them in post.

Not only is paying NHS midwives a decent wage the right thing to do, it is necessary to tackle the shortage of midwives and thereby improve the care received by women and their babies.

Recommendations on NHS pay are made each year by the independent NHS Pay Review Body. The PRB was set up in the 1980s to take the setting of NHS pay out of politics. In recent years however the Government has capped what the PRB can recommend – putting the politics back into NHS pay.

THE RCM IS ASKING PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES TO SUPPORT THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE NHS PAY REVIEW BODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO MAKE ITS OWN INDEPENDENT RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAY WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HONOUR THOSE RECOMMENDATIONS.

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