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The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is the professional association and trade union representing 95% of all practising midwives in the UK. The vast majority of midwives work within the NHS, and the RCM is recognised in every Trust that provides a midwifery service.

If you would like more information on the College or anything contained in this manifesto please contact:

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YOUR SUPPORT OUR FUTURE

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YOUR SUPPORT OUR FUTURE

A manifesto for maternity services from the
Royal College of Midwives



In 2003 695,500 babies were born in the UK. Midwives are primarily responsible for providing care for pregnant mothers and their new born infants. Skilled midwifery care increases the chance of a healthy mother and baby.

This manifesto outlines the changes which midwives recommend to benefit the health of the nation – we ask for your support in making these changes happen.

1. Making choice a reality

Women want choice over where and how they give birth. For many that means the opportunity to experience birth without unnecessary medical intervention. Social models of care - where births take place in the home, or in a midwife led unit - reduce instances of unnecessary caesarean sections or other intrusive medical procedures.

The Government must pledge to provide women with a genuine choice over their care by increasing the care available outside of hospitals and offering a variety of maternity service models delivered and led by midwives.

2. A well staffed service

The UK doesn't have enough midwives to meet current need. RCM evidence suggests that two-thirds of midwifery leaders believe their units don't have enough resources allocated to them. Staff shortages reduce standards of care and result in less 1 to 1 care for mothers, families and newborns.

The Government must recruit 10,000 more midwives in the next Parliament.

3. A fair deal for midwives

Midwives need fair terms and conditions if they are to be retained by the service. While the implementation of Agenda for Change was welcomed, midwives are now concerned that the review of the NHS pension scheme will result in a reduced retirement income for many. Student midwives also require more support - currently 1 in 5 students are dropping out of training.

The review of the NHS pension scheme must not reduce benefits for midwives and the Government should offer more support to student midwives by providing a £10,000 annual non means tested bursary.

4. Supporting teenage mothers

Around one in 15 births in the UK is to a woman under the age of 18. Teenage mothers are more likely to suffer from medical problems such as post-natal depression and are more likely to have babies with a lower than average birth weight. The RCM believes that it is essential that these women are offered increased support to improve their life chances. The current income support system actually discriminates against this particularly vulnerable group.

The Government must pay mothers under 24 the full adult rate of income support.

5. Support for breastfeeding mothers

Breastfeeding infants has a number of proven health benefits for both mother and baby, in particular protecting the infant from many infectious diseases and allergies. Yet only a fifth of UK mothers breastfeed for the recommended six months after childbirth. While women have the right to make an informed choice about feeding, social stigma can still act as a deterrent for women who want to breastfeed their babies.

The Government must promote breastfeeding as a social norm by making it illegal to prevent a woman from breastfeeding her baby in a public place.

6. Providing a smoke free environment

Smoking when pregnant can affect the health of the unborn infant. Risks include pre-term delivery and low birth weight. These risks occur even if the woman does not smoke herself but is exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. Pregnant women should not be prevented from taking a full and active role in the community due to the risk to their unborn infant.

The Government must reduce exposure to environmental tobacco smoke by banning smoking in all enclosed public places.



PLEASE FILL IN THIS COUPON AND TELL US WHICH OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PLEDGES YOU SUPPORT:

I support numbers:

1. Making choice a reality

2. A well staffed service

3. A fair deal for midwives

4. Supporting teenage mothers

5. Support for breastfeeding mothers

6. Providing a smoke free environment

Or

I support all of the above
(please tick)

I would like more information on the RCM and its activities.
(please tick)

Name

Constituency

Party

Address

Telephone

Email