Midwives plan protest over breastfeeding ban

By Colin Parish

Midwives are threatening to challenge the recent ruling that bans breastfeeding in the House of Commons by staging a mass protest over the ruling overturned.

In a debate on an emergency motion at the Royal College of Midwives annual conference last week, RCM council member Dorcas Akeju urged midwives to write to their MPs in a bid to get the ruling overturned.

Somerset midwife Catherine Fairbairn said such 'prejudice, covert discrimination and inhibition' should not be allowed. She said midwives should 'struggle for the emancipation of breastfeeding mothers and their babies everywhere'.

In a separate debate on the promotion of breastfeeding, Nottingham midwife Julie Wright called on the RCM to lobby the government to fund a national advertising campaign for breastfeeding.

Pointing out the amount of money spent on advertising by infant feed companies, she said this was the only way to 'turn the tide against a sea of formula milk'.

Belinda Cox, who practises in Glasgow, said breastfeeding needs to be more visible and acceptable on television and in magazines. 'Breastfeeding is a normal part of life. Long-term health gains will fill the nation's coffers. The government must invest in breast,' Ms Cox said.

But Leeds University professor of midwifery Mary Renfrew said results of its recent systematic review showed national media campaigns tend only to work for middle-class women. Professor Renfrew said local campaigns work better and that promoting breastfeeding makes a difference, especially in low-income groups. Despite these concerns, the government launched a national campaign this week.

RCM general secretary Karlene Davis used her address to launch the college's blueprint for the development of midwifery services, Vision 2000.

The document sets out 12 key principles that the RCM says should underpin high-quality, evidence-based care that is cost-effective and responsive to women's needs.

She said the principles would help midwives become 'a strong and determined force for change'.

Moves to reduce Caesarean rates

SEVEN IN ten mothers will give birth by Caesarean section by 2010 if NHS maternity care continues in its present vein, National Childbirth Trust (NCT) chief executive Belinda Phipps told the conference.

Normal vaginal delivery would happen only if women requested it, and some delivery rooms would have to be converted to operating theatres, she predicted.

Her comments came during one of a series of debates on the rapid rise in Caesarean section rates in the UK over recent years.

North London midwife Patricia John said women were not being done any favours by being offered Caesarean section on request. 'No other area gives expensive, risky treatment on request,' she said.

Alison Williams, who also practises in the capital, said doctors were largely to blame for the increase, as performing a Caesarean was one way obstetricians could maintain their power and control over increasingly autonomous midwives.

A call for interdisciplinary guidelines to be developed in conjunction with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists received overwhelming backing.

The RCM will also publicise models of midwifery which produce lower Caesarean section rates.

on the move

Richard Hogston has been appointed head of Hull University's school of nursing. He joins from the NHS Executive, where he has been nursing officer responsible for education and training since 1996.

Di Marks-Maran has been appointed head of the Wolfson Institute of Health Sciences' new school of postgraduate and research studies, based at Thames Valley University. The school will bring together the institute's six research centres and all of its postgraduate research centres.

Dame Betty Kershaw has become a non-executive director of Rampton Hospital Authority. She is a former RCM president.

Obi Amadi has been appointed lead professional for health visiting by the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association (CPHVA). She joins from Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust, London, where she was services manager, having previously worked as a midwife and health visitor in the capital.

Pat Jackson has been appointed professional officer for school health and public health by the CPHVA. This is an extension to her existing role, in which she only covered school health.

Nuala Vranges has joined Orbis, an international charity dedicated to eliminating avoidable blindness. She will treat patients and train nurses in ten locations, including Uzbekistan, China and Cuba, over the next year.