

Education, education, education

It has been almost 3 years since the publication and launch of the MINT project (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), 2010) and two things have brought this back to the forefront of my mind. The project was a NMC commissioned study which aimed to explore the contribution of midwife teachers in preparing students for competent practice. For the purposes of the study a midwife teacher was defined as a University employed midwife who has gained or is working towards a NMC recordable teaching qualification (NMC, 2010). This was a significant study in relation to midwifery education and participants included students, Local Supervising Authority midwifery officers, teachers and newly qualified midwives and their preceptors. The findings identified that 'student midwives found that their curriculum was most effective when midwife teachers taught most of it' or applied 'generic subjects to midwifery practice' (NMC, 2010; 29). Teachers were also noted as leading the design and organisation of the curriculum and the inclusion of supervisors of midwives on the team was thought to enhance communication with mentors and managers. It also acknowledged that a core of the team should be research active and that the midwife teacher was valued for their unique and crucial role.

Teaching, however, does not appear to have the glitz and glamour of research and can easily be lost in higher education establishments unless midwives are strong advocates for their role. Midwifery programmes tend to have small numbers and some distinct features such as supervision and dedicated standards for pre-registration education which are different from nursing. Because of this there can be a lack of understanding and it is the role of the lead midwife for education and other educationalists to ensure their needs are fully understood.

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So back to those two things that made me consider the importance of education. The first was attendance at the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) inaugural education conference which was attended by like-minded experienced and new to education lecturers and practice educators. The focus was educating for a compassionate workforce, which is obviously core to the role of the midwife and therefore integral to training. The six Cs are something that are now considered from recruitment through to qualification of midwives and again supports the role midwife teachers play in relating theory to practice. It was also interesting to share experiences, discuss changes within midwifery education and appreciate that the same challenges and issues are occurring nationally. It was stimulating and motivating in relation to our role as educationalists and a forum for this is much welcomed. Personally, aside from student feedback both formal and informal, I find there is little done to acknowledge the part we play in preparing students for practice.

The second incident was when a friend of mine, a non-educator but a leading expert in his field was approached to put together a 12-week course about leadership (not healthcare). He contacted me as aside from content he had no idea where to

start. Talking him through the processes, philosophies, models and teaching strategies left him bewildered to say the very least. He did not appreciate what went on 'behind the scenes', previously thinking that healthcare students learnt in practice supported by 'some reading'. He realised that expertise is not enough to ensure student learning and its application in the workplace and that he would need assistance in his task. His comment that we are great value for money certainly resonated with me.

A sound knowledge of education is needed in order to ensure that a curriculum for midwifery education is fit for purpose and leads to midwives who are fit to practise at the point of registration and beyond. This needs to be updated and evaluated constantly being receptive to changes in practice and the needs of service users. Students need to be taught through a variety of stimulating teaching methods and teachers must work closely with mentors and practice educators to enhance learning. Placements need to expose students to all aspects of midwifery practice but particularly low risk, normal birth which seems to be an ever decreasing part of practice. Education and training are the foundations on which all future care is based and in the words of Anne Marie Rafferty at the RCM conference 'educating midwives means a ripple effect improving the lives of the public'.

So I appreciate I am slightly biased but everyone from students, mentors to teachers need to value themselves and the part they play in preparing the workforce and midwives of the future. Education, education, education is to midwifery what location, location, location is to property so let's value midwife teachers as highly as researchers for their contribution to women's health.

BJM

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2010) *The MINT project: midwives in teaching—Evaluation of whether Midwife Teachers bring a unique contribution particularly in the context of outcomes for women and their families*. NMC, London