

# Maternity safety champions

*What is a maternity safety champion and what does the role involve? Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent has the answers—from the key responsibilities of the job to where it will go next*

Every time I am asked to explain the role of the maternity safety champion, I think about how healthcare policy is translated into action and how it influences the practical, day-to-day operations of maternity care. I also reflect on how new roles are developed and deployed. *A guide to support maternity safety champions* (NHS Improvement, 2018) outlines key actions, which should increase awareness and knowledge of the role and assist with the consistent deployment of the role across the maternity system. However, to understand the development and implementation of this important role and its effect, evaluation is required.

## The genesis of the maternity safety champion

This is a relatively new role in the NHS in England. It was developed to help improve the safety of maternity care alongside the Maternity Transformation Programme, which aims to drive improvement in maternity services.

The Safer Maternity Care action plan (Department of Health and Social Care, 2017) set out to make maternity care in England the safest in the world, and describes the actions needed to halve the rates of stillbirths, maternal and neonatal deaths and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth, by 2025.

Five key areas of focus for providing safer maternity care are outlined in the plan: leadership, learning and best practice, teams, data and innovation. The plan made the case for strong leaders, namely maternity safety champions, at all levels

of the system; working across regional, organisational or service boundaries to promote the professional cultures needed for better care.

## Champions at all levels

Maternity safety champions aim to work across professional groups and system boundaries. They promote learning and innovation, seeking out best practice and sharing it across the system through newsletters and webinars.

The Safer Maternity Care action plan outlined the requirement for a maternity safety champion at Trust board level, supported by a midwife and an obstetrician. This should ensure that there is a focus on improving maternity outcomes and unencumbered communication from clinic to board. Developing and maintaining relationships with clinical networks and the regional maternal and neonatal health safety collaborative is an essential requirement.

In the maternity clinical networks the maternity safety champion should act as a local quality improvement advisor, sharing findings from local investigations, initiatives and research. Developing and maintaining relationships between maternity clinical networks and neonatal operational delivery networks is also a key part of this role.

## In the name of maternity safety

To apprise the board of issues requiring board level attention, maternity safety champions, and in particular Trust board champions, should be familiar with the numerous initiatives that aim to improve maternity safety, including MBRRACE reports, national maternity and perinatal audits, friends and family tests, stillbirth rates, progress with implementing the Saving Babies' Lives care bundle, and results from cases meeting the Each Baby Counts criteria and serious incident investigations.

All maternity safety champions have a chance to improve safety in maternity services. To develop the role, maternity safety champions should consider:

- Knowledge of initiatives that aim to improve maternity safety—what do they do? What are the outcomes?
- Establishing key relationships with the governance and risk lead, health and safety lead, Quality Improvement (QI) lead and the associated QI programme
- Improvements required and how they are made
- Influencing the content of the local and board level risk register
- Learning from other safety champions and sharing best practice within networks and across boundaries
- Celebrating success and sharing this knowledge with the board
- The safety champion leadership role and its influence

Maternity safety champions can play an important role in improving maternity safety, but knowledge and understanding of the role are crucial to its development. To broaden knowledge of the role and maternity safety, a bi-monthly newsletter is published by NHS Improvement, providing information and updates on maternity safety initiatives, recent announcements, relevant publications and forthcoming events. This can be accessed at: <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/maternity-safety-champions/>.

If the safety champion in your organisation has changed roles or moved Trust, send updates to: [nhsi.maternitysafetychampions@nhs.net](mailto:nhsi.maternitysafetychampions@nhs.net). **BJM**

Department of Health and Social Care. Safer Maternity Care: Progress and Next Steps. London: The Stationery Office; 2017  
 NHS Improvement. *A guide to support maternity safety champions*: London: NHS England; 2018

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