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# Actions speak louder than words

Just a few weeks into his new role as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock unveiled his first major initiative: a consultation with health professionals (Department of Health, 2018a). Yes, the head of the NHS has launched a radical new plan to actually listen to the people he leads. The digital platform, 'Talk Health and Care' (Department of Health 2018b), will allow all NHS staff to give their views on five areas, including training, bullying, and 'getting the basics right'.

This appears to be a chance for health professionals to express how they think the NHS could improve. This is not to say that they haven't been doing so already—the shortage of midwives, for example, has been well publicised for several years (Ewers, 2016)—but this new platform amplifies these concerns. Comments are public and on record, as are the responses from Mr Hancock himself, which might mitigate the feeling that health professionals have been shouting into the ether until now. This is therefore an opportunity not just to voice an opinion, but to hold the Health Secretary's assurances to account.

Yet while midwifery has been providing feedback to the Government about issues such as Brexit and the shortage of midwives, the profession also receives feedback of its own. Last month, an unexpected debate broke out about the use of Mumsnet to share birth stories, with all the potential for unregulated hyperbole (both positive and negative) that this engenders (Marsh, 2018). Justine Roberts, CEO of Mumsnet, has said that 'one of the most common complaints on this topic is "Why on Earth didn't anyone tell me the truth about how bad it could be?"' (Marsh, 2018).

This is not the first time that Mumsnet has provoked a reaction in maternity services: last year, at the Royal College of Midwives' annual conference, Roberts presented data that pointed to deficiencies in postnatal care. The statistics were damning, and the validity of the research fiercely debated (Newman, 2017).

Although the pros and cons of social media is a topic for another editorial, seeing women turning to forums such as Mumsnet is feedback in itself, indicating a need for reasoned, yet honest, stories of childbirth. These are accounts that could be disseminated by maternity services, which have the resources, expertise and experience to lend them credibility.

Midwives, and health professionals in general, are fighting to be heard in Government, while addressing the concerns of those in their care. Unfortunately, there is as yet no evidence that Matt Hancock's responses to NHS staff are anything other than platitudes, but as those who know how it feels to go unheard, maternity staff have the chance to show how consultations can turn feedback into change. Because of course, actions speak louder than words. **BJM**

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