

BIRTHRIGHTS RESPONSE TO PRESSURE POINTS REPORT

Embargoed until 00:01 Monday 7 April 2014

In response to the release of the second Pressure Points report from the RCM today, Elizabeth Prochaska (co-chair of the human rights in childbirth charity Birthrights) commented:

*"This survey and report add to the growing picture of a fragmented and overwhelmed postnatal service for new mothers in the UK. Birthrights' recent Dignity in Childbirth survey focused on antenatal and intrapartum care. Nevertheless women used it to tell us of their disappointment in their treatment after their baby had been born. One woman stated that **'the care after giving birth was terrible, ruining the whole birthing experience.'***

It is crucial that commissioners ensure that services are not only able to meet the basic clinical needs of postnatal women and babies but that they are adequately staffed with appropriately trained people to ensure new families are treated with compassion and respect at this vulnerable time. As part of our ongoing Dignity in Childbirth campaign Birthrights continues to work with initiatives across the UK to research and promote models of care that make positive postnatal experiences a reality."

Please contact press@birthrights.org.uk or call 07793084945 for more information or to arrange interviews.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- Birthrights is the UK's only organisation dedicated to improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality. We aspire to advance the human rights and lawful treatment of all child-bearing women.
- Birthrights is a registered charity funded entirely by donations and run by volunteers. We are currently raising funds for our [Dignity in Childbirth Campaign](#).
- Further details about the campaign can be found on [our website](#).



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- Details of the RCM's Pressure Points report can be found here: <http://www.rcm.org.uk/college/campaigns-events/pressurepoints/>
- A summary of the human rights in childbirth situation in the UK is provided below

WHY DO HUMAN RIGHTS MATTER TO PREGNANT WOMEN?

The care that pregnant women receive during pregnancy and childbirth has a long-lasting effect on the physical and psychological health of women and their babies. Lack of respect for women's basic rights during childbirth can lead to women feeling degraded and dehumanised. The fundamental human rights values of dignity, privacy, equality and autonomy help guarantee women access to appropriate maternity services and respectful treatment during childbirth.

WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION IN CHILDBIRTH?

Failure to provide adequate maternity care, lack of respect for women's dignity, invasions of privacy, procedures carried out without consent, failure to provide adequate pain relief without medical contraindication, unnecessary or unexplained medical interventions, and lack of respect for women's choices about where and how a birth takes place, may all violate human rights law.

ARE WOMEN'S RIGHTS BEING VIOLATED IN THE UK?

Sadly, there is evidence that too many women in the UK are experiencing maternity care that does not respect their basic rights. Strain on under-resourced maternity services, a culture of excessive emphasis on clinical policy rather than individualised care, and misunderstanding of basic legal responsibilities, all contribute to poor quality care that can lead to violations of women's dignity and autonomy.

ARE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS COVERED BY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW?

Under the Human Rights Act 1998, all UK public bodies must respect the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights. Public bodies include all NHS institutions, such as hospitals, Primary Care Trusts, NHS Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups. This means that NHS bodies must respect human rights when making decisions. It also means that caregivers working for public bodies must respect human rights as they go about their work.

DOES HUMAN RIGHTS LAW PROTECT UNBORN CHILDREN?



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No. Unborn children do not have separate legal recognition from their mothers. Women are free to make choices against medical advice and, so long as they have mental capacity, they cannot be forced to accept treatment which is said to be in the interest of their unborn child.