

# Leading By Example

Andrea Teasdale, matron for antenatal, postnatal and gynaecological services at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, discusses the role of MSWs

Maternity support workers (MSWs) play an important role in supporting midwives and the wider maternity teams, mothers and their babies through pregnancy, labour and during the postnatal period. However, within the current workforce, the roles, responsibilities and job titles of MSWs in England vary widely.



Throughout my midwifery career I have supported, guided, mentored and encouraged MSW colleagues to undertake training through secondment schemes, trust-led initiatives and RCM study days, as well as supporting several to undertake midwifery and nursing training.

The RCM *Roles and Responsibilities of MSWs* guide was first published in 2011. An expert reference group was convened to support its development. The objective was to provide guidance on what tasks an MSW could not undertake and those that they could, subject to the appropriate education and training and assessment of competence. The booklet was written for MSWs, midwives and other stakeholders who worked in the maternity setting. In 2016 the publication was updated. It is still widely used in NHS trusts and health boards

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across the UK as a benchmark for job descriptions and competency frameworks.

### Competency and consistency

In 2017 Health Education England (HEE) commissioned the RCM to undertake a scoping project on the deployment, education and development of MSWs in England. The RCM worked with King's College London and surveyed MSWs across the UK about their jobs, training, career development and pay.

The results showed that while 68% of MSWs had heard of apprenticeships in England, only 5% had heard of the national NHS support worker policy Talent for Care. More than 30% had completed or were completing the care certificate – 23% had not heard of the care certificate.



Most trusts/health boards have incorporated various standards from the care certificate into induction programmes. In March 2018 the then secretary of state for health and social care, Jeremy Hunt, announced that a more defined role for MSWs was needed. This included a national competency and career framework similar to those in place for a number of years in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Unlike these countries, the training offered to MSWs in England is dependent on where they are working, with some undertaking a foundation degree or an apprenticeship while others only have access to in-house training. The pay banding of MSW posts is also inconsistent. Many MSWs are undertaking Band 3 responsibilities but being paid at Band 2.

HEE has developed the Maternity Support Worker Competency, Education and Career

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Development Framework, working closely with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. The framework draws from and builds upon excellent examples of good practice from across the system.

### The Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells project

The partnership between HEE and the RCM has formed the foundation for the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells (MTW) project. There were no other options as the national agenda is to standardise competencies and training to provide a knowledge base for those MSWs employed in trusts and to provide a progressive career pathway to a registerable qualification, should they wish to progress. Although it is not a mandatory requirement for individual trusts now, it will be in the near future.

The purpose of the project was to align MTW maternity support worker staff, Bands 2 and 3, to the national framework, adopting best practice from organisations that have successfully aligned their MSW workforce, ensuring the MTW framework meets the needs of our organisation.

- Phasing the training over three years to meet budget requirements
- Including the project in workforce planning budgets for three years (forecasted timeframe for the upskilling of existing staff)
- Intelligent staffing including the Band 3 MSW workforce in the 'safe staffing' aspect of workforce planning - working to a 90/10 Midwifery/MSW workforce split as recommended by Birthrate Plus



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- Ensure all existing Band 3 MSWs have the necessary knowledge and skills aligned to their banding
- Ensure all existing Band 2 MSWs who already possess the knowledge and skills aligned to Band 3 are upgraded
- Develop a bespoke MTW knowledge and skills upgrade package to align all staff to Band 3
- Ensure All MSWs are supported and treated with fairness and equity in order to undertake any training required
- Protection of salary while undertaking apprenticeship training for existing staff
- Staff at Band 3 level who do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills, and who do not wish to undertake the required training/apprenticeship, can voluntarily move down to a Band 2 level; limiting the areas in which they can work

All staff employed at Band 2 level to be offered the necessary training and Upskilling MSWs in England will give their role greater recognition.

Level 3 apprenticeship, with guaranteed upgrade to Band 3 upon completion

- Ensure the recruitment of new MSW staff aligns to Band 3 – offering the Level 3 apprenticeship to those who are not Band 3-ready at this point.

### Benefits and challenges

The project was a large undertaking and the mapping/benchmarking of the academic certification of the MSW establishment was very long overdue. The benefits to the service include:

- Up-to-date knowledge and skills data set held for each MSW within the maternity establishment

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- Aligned with national recommendations from RCM and HEE
- Robust training package now established and secured for the future
- Improved working relationships with major stakeholders
- Hard-to-reach/remote workers included and engaged in the project
- Updated and skilled MSW workforce = safer, high-quality care for the women accessing the service
- Career progression pathways created for the MSW workforce
- New roles in development for the MSW workforce (eg postnatal discharge coordinator)
- 90/10 split possible in the postnatal pathways with midwives and MSWs could enhance Continuity of Care
- Increased networking with other trusts and HEE
- MSW establishment who feel valued and included in the strategic vision for maternity services.

However, anxiety was exhibited by several staff regarding the thought of academic training. Some staff were very negative about the project and did not wish to partake of the upskilling opportunity. The negativity was confined to this small group, which was surprising to me. Several one-to-one meetings ensued, allowing rumours to be dispelled, first-hand information to be imparted and reassurance provided that support and guidance was available to every MSW undertaking the training.

To date, all MSWs have commenced or completed the care certificate and the competencies. The first eight have commenced the Level 3 apprenticeship. Those who require updating in functional skills are receiving peer group and one-to-one sessions for support.

The project was pitched to the MSWs as a great opportunity for them to be recognised and valued financially for the contribution they make to maternity.

Succession planning is essential, and the project has enabled the MSW workforce to be aligned the Midwifery Apprenticeship Pathway being piloted nationally. I am thrilled to be supporting two MSWs on this pilot.

### 📧More Info

The pilot commenced in January 2020. If you would like advice on how to implement similar, email [andrea.teasdale@nhs.net](mailto:andrea.teasdale@nhs.net)