Midwives under Pressure

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The Panorama investigation titled “Midwives under Pressure” aired this week on BBC One. It investigated the crisis in maternity care that, they argue, is putting women and babies at risk. The programme concentrated on the dangers of understaffing in hospital trusts, particularly a trust in Gloucestershire.

The statistics quoted in the programme were nothing short of terrifying:

- 10% of maternity services were considered below a reasonable safety standard.
- There is a perceived shortage of 2,500 midwives across the UK.
- A 64% increase in reporting of red flag incidents and
- More delay in induction of labour causes significant injury and, sometimes, death to the baby and/or mother.

It concluded its investigation by setting out the steps being taken by the trust in Gloucestershire and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to make improvements.

The leading cause for concern is the lack of midwives across the NHS.

It was pointed out that during their careers, midwives have seen ever-decreasing numbers on wards when compared to the number of women they must care for on that ward. In Gloucestershire, this was said to have been as few as two midwives to maybe 6,8 or more women.

Decreasing numbers of midwives leads to delays in care on the ward. That may be a delay in the provision of pain relief, or it might equally be a delay in the routine observations for women in active labour. This, in turn, means that midwives are missing opportunities to spot difficulties, increased risks and potential dangers to the mother and their unborn baby.

It was stressed that things can change during labour within minutes and that one of the ways to ensure better

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outcomes for mothers and babies is to increase the number of midwives so that the appropriate monitoring and support can be provided to women in labour.

Tragically, failures in maternity care can lead to babies being born with significant disabilities and devastating neurological issues. Sometimes, these failures can lead to a baby dying or the death of the mother. These outcomes are, very often, avoidable.

Lester Aldridge is experienced in pursuing and succeeding with claims for children born across the UK, with particular experience in Gloucestershire, especially standalone midwifery units, including Stroud, with disabilities as a result of failures in maternity care during pregnancy, labour and the neonatal period as well as failings that result in the death of babies or their mothers. We approach these cases with empathy and honesty to ensure that our clients have the best support throughout what can be a long and emotional process. We have access to nationwide experts who are leaders in their field.

Recent successes have involved children born with cerebral palsy as a result of injury during labour, with settlement figures over £17 million.

Liz Oaten, Partner and accredited clinical negligence lawyer with AvMa, APIL and the Law Society, says: *"These are very complex claims where lives have been shattered, so many mother's seek to blame themselves for the injuries sustained by their babies and whilst no amount of money can ever truly reflect the harm caused we can, through experience, achieve settlements that can go some way towards securing the future for the injured child."*

How can we help?

Here at Lester Aldridge, our highly skilled and experienced medical negligence lawyers can offer help with birth injury claims.

Please contact us at online.enquiries@la-law.com or call 0344 967 0791 to find out more information on how we can help you.

Further help and resources

There are also charities that can help to provide support and assistance:

- Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA)
- Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL)

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