Do we deserve trial by media?

Wray, J

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<td>Published Date</td>
<td>2006</td>
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Do we deserve trial by media?

It seems much easier to blame those on the ‘frontline’, but do midwives deserve such negative attention?

A barrage of negative press

I feel quite concerned about the current barrage of negative press, portraying staff – in particular, midwives and obstetricians – as people to fear and not trust. Of course, some individuals may fall into this category, but that applies to the human race at large. I argue that public expectations have moved into the realm of ‘wants’ rather than ‘needs’ – and the distinction between the two is quite profound, in my view. The NHS by design, in its philosophy and objectives, is unable to meet the ‘wants’ of people. Indeed, the media has to take some responsibility for contributing to the expectation that ‘wants’ can be met within the NHS.

A factor that ought to be highlighted in terms of healthcare provision is what I call ‘the hierarchy of illness’, whereby certain illnesses or diseases reap vast amounts of attention and funds at the expense of other mainstream illnesses and diseases that are able to establish a firm power base with healthcare commissioners, the public and government. For example, reproductive health – in particular, sexual health – is way down the ‘hierarchy of illness’, as is...
Our leaders could do far more to address the prejudiced interpretations inflicted by the media and NHS management

children and family health. Linked to this is the competitive nature of health and illness and the associated importance of different kinds of work and skills. A heart surgeon is seen as being invaluable to healthcare whereas genito-urinary medicine is viewed as being less important and glamorous.

I think this analogy relates to childbirth in that the arguments about health and illness are very much embedded in maternity care provision, and role boundaries between midwives and obstetricians are often blurred. Childbirth and maternity services have received a lot of bad press, but it would seem that this is much more related to the economics of medical payouts than to investments in a highly skilled workforce that we can be proud of as it deals with a contemporary maternity service.

I am not sure we totally deserve this ‘trial by media’. As mentioned previously, childbirth is a complex endeavour. Our leaders could do far more to address the prejudiced interpretations inflicted by the media and NHS management. The Practising Midwife would be interested in your views. TPM

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REFERENCES