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Midwifery basics: becoming a midwife 2. Professionalism, public confidence and course application

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Article 2. Professionalism, public confidence and midwifery course application.

This article will consider why professionalism is an issue in maintaining public confidence, why midwives need to demonstrate good health and good character and how applicants are selected for midwifery courses to meet these attributes.

Why is professionalism an issue?

Within healthcare, professionalism is undergoing scrutiny due to recognition that public confidence has been eroded in recent years following the Mid Staffordshire enquiry, (DH 2013) and in midwifery the joint review of University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust by the NMC, Local Supervising Authority (LSA) review team and the CQC (NMC 2011), NMC LSA Extraordinary reviews 2014 and 2015 and the Kirkup enquiry (2015). This has led to the trust of the general public being undermined by the actions of individual practitioners and institutional and organisational failures.

The context in which midwifery care is given is one of striving for excellence with finite resources; a society where communication through electronic means is readily available and boundaries are becoming more fluid. Similarly to the findings of Morrow who noted (2011:24) 'the internet and social media were discussed as a threat to the boundary between professional and private selves, and this extended to privacy', the boundary between midwives/student midwives and clients may be similarly blurred. Midwives who are texting and using social media within their professional roles may experience possible confusion over professional and personal use or be unaware how widely messages can be spread via social media. Midwifery students need to understand the advantages and disadvantages and be encouraged to exercise responsible use of social media.

With the integration of Expert Patient groups (Service Users) in healthcare, expectations of personalised care (Dept for Health, Public Health England 2014) and empowerment of women in their childbirth choices, the bar for care excellence and professionalism is high. Therefore it is essential that the recruitment process identifies the applicants with the attitudes that can be developed for professional practice. Recruitment to a midwifery course has to meet the NMC Standards for pre-registration midwifery education (2009). The standards include consideration of educational attainment, assessment of numeracy and literacy, where possible a face to face interview and demonstration that applicants have good health and good character sufficient for entry and participation in a course leading to qualification as a midwife (NMC 2009).

What is Good Health and Good Character?

At face value this sounds easily attainable and most people would describe themselves as having good health and being of good character. However, this is a statement with a more complex meaning.

As the NMC have a primary duty to safeguard the public, the definition of good health and good character is such that it attempts to assure that applicants to the course and who are currently studying display the professional attributes and behaviour required in the The Code (NMC 2015). These attributes are a pre requisite for NMC registration; an applicant having to self declare their fitness to practise on initial registration, at registration renewal and if they are readmitted to the register. At the initial registration of midwives on the NMC register, good health and good character have to be verified by a third party and this is a duty of the Lead Midwife for Education (NMC 2009). Midwives and nurses are then expected to continue to maintain their good health and good character and abide by The Code (NMC 2015). Self declaration of continuing good health and character is part of the new NMC revalidation process from April 2015 (NMC 2015a:24). If an incident occurs whereby the registrants' good health or good character is not maintained the expectation is that the NMC will be informed by the registrant (NMC 2015 23:2).

How do the NMC define Good Health and Character?

The Code (2015) sets the standards of health and character expected of a registrant. The NMC states that these standards signify what good nursing and midwifery practice looks like. When applying to the register, or renewing registration the registrant is agreeing to uphold all the standards that are integral to being a professional. The standards include Standard 20, Uphold the reputation of the profession, act with honesty and integrity, keep to the laws of the country in which you practise and maintain your health so that you can undertake your role.

It is a fundamental requirement for a nurse or midwife to be of sufficient character and health to be capable of safe and effective practices. This means practice without restriction. NMC (2015b), from Article 5 (2) (b) of the Nursing and Midwifery Order (2001).

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'Good Health' means that the applicant is capable of safe and effective practice either with or without reasonable adjustments. It does not mean the absence of a health condition or disability' NMC (2015b) from articles 9 (2) (b) of the Nursing and Midwifery Order (2001) and rule 6, Registration Rules.

Good Character.

In addition to the standards identified in the NMC Code (2015) each applicant seeking to join the register must declare any pending charges, convictions, police cautions or decisions

made by any other regulatory body. The NMC will also consider any conduct issues that would breach The Code (NMC 2015), irrespective of whether this resulted in criminal proceedings. Applicants only being admitted to the register if they satisfy the NMC Registrar that they are capable of safe and effective practice.

Some areas of behaviour may cross between the students' professional, personal and social life. Where behaviour impacts upon professional practice for students or practitioners this may be framed within The Code by which students' and practitioners are bound - for example the section of The Code on professionalism and Trust (NMC 2015:p15): [Editors](#)
[You may wish this in a separate box](#)

20. Uphold the reputation of your profession at all times

- 20.1 keep to and uphold the standards and values set out in the code
- 20.2 act with honesty and integrity at all times, treating people fairly and without discrimination, bullying or harassment
- 20.3 be aware at all times how your behaviour can affect and influence the behaviour of other people
- 20.4. keep to the laws of the country in which you are practising.
- 20.5 treat people in a way that does not take advantage of their vulnerability or cause them upset and distress
- 20.6 stay objective and have clear professional boundaries at all times with people in your care(including those who have been in your care in the past), their families and their carers
- 20.7 make sure you do not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious or moral beliefs) to people in an inappropriate way
- 20.8 act as a role model of professional behaviour for students and newly qualified nurses and midwives to aspire to
- 20.9 maintain the level of health you need to carry out your professional role
- 20.10 use all forms of spoken written and digital communication (including social media and networking sites) responsibly, respecting the right to privacy of others at all times.
- 23.2 tell us and any employers as soon as you can about any caution or charge against you, or if you have received a conditional discharge in relation to, or have been found guilty of, a criminal offence (other than a protected caution or conviction).

For qualified practitioners the standards of personal, social and professional behaviour are specified within The Code, NMC (2015) and it is against this that cases will be judged. The

NMC code and its standards can be seen as a way of promoting professionalism, however where there is a failure to meet these standards this will bring a practitioners' fitness to practise into question either through conduct or competence concerns. Issues of conduct such as inappropriate use of social media, dishonesty, theft, fraud, substance misuse, drink driving / alcohol misuse or racism, may be subject to criminal investigation as well as professional sanction. The NMC professional standards (2015) serve three functions, to uphold the law, to provide a guide for the minimum standards of practice and provide opportunity for sanctions when a practitioners' conduct or competence falls short.

Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection to midwifery courses need to follow an application process to meet the Undergraduate Courses at Universities and College (UCAS) system and to recruit applicants with the core values that meet the NHS core values and will lead to a student upholding the values and standards in the NMC Code (2015).

Potential applicants who meet or expect to meet (subject to examination results) the course entry criteria, apply via UCAS supplying their academic qualifications, their personal statement and a reference. The applications are then screened for suitability and applicants selected for shortlisting and attendance at a selection event. The aim within selection is to choose applicants who demonstrate that they have the personal attributes and potential to be kind, caring and competent midwives, who can aspire to achieve the knowledge, skills and professional attitudes for safe and competent practice both within Standard 17 of the pre-registration midwifery standards (NMC 2009) and achieve a minimum of a Bachelor of Science midwifery degree. Successful completion of the course, the signing of the Declaration of Good Health and Character (NMC 2009), meeting the NMC screening requirements of good health and character and the fee payment will lead to successful registration as a midwife with the Nursing and Midwifery Council. Both during training and as a midwife, the expectation is that the student/midwife will meet the professional standards set in 'The Code', (NMC 2015)

As midwifery courses comprise both theory and clinical practice, university and practice partners have a joint responsibility for recruitment to the profession. A joint recruitment and selection policy which will follow the requirements of the Health Education England (2014) for recruiting applicants whom it is believed can uphold the values of the NHS Constitution - Care, Compassion, Courage, Commitment, Competence and Communication (The 6 C's), (DH 2012) meets the requirements for admission to pre registration midwifery courses (NMC

2009) and the local processes to achieve this will have been formally agreed. Applicants will be assessed using a Values Based Recruitment (VBR) strategy (DH 2014) that is designed to elicit these qualities. Literacy and numeracy will be assessed and a face to face interview or multiple mini interviews conducted. Two references are required, preferably an academic and an employment /character reference. Following successful offers and acceptance, applicants will complete a confidential Occupational Health appraisal to ensure they are physically and psychologically fit, to enter the course and participate in clinical practice. Applicants will receive relevant immunisations before entering clinical practice. In order to protect the public, prior to course entry and before clinical practice can be started, applicants are required to have a 'clear' enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. The DBS check and the issues that may arise are explored in article three.

Practice points

- 1. Consider how as a student midwife, you may inadvertently breach professional boundaries.**
- 2. Consider your use of social media. How will you need to adjust this to ensure you remain within the NMC Code (2015) and within the NMC (2016) Guidance on using social media responsibly?**
- 3. Review your local Trust guidelines on social media use to ensure that you also follow these.**
- 4. Think about your health and emotional wellbeing, being a student midwife can be stressful, identify the support mechanisms that you have in place and those that you need to develop for support.**

This article has considered why professionalism is an issue in maintaining public confidence, why midwives need to demonstrate good health and good character and how applicants are initially selected for midwifery courses to meet these attributes. The next article will continue by considering issues of personal conduct that may arise during course application including application for Disclosure and Barring Service clearance screening.

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