Twitter Thread by Rosamund Urwin



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Pregnancy in the pandemic: a thread (1/ a lot). The NHS has finally changed its guidance to say women should be allowed to have their partner there 'at all times': scans, in labour ward from the start and not just for 'active labour'. I gave birth 8 days ago.

I found out I was pregnant with my first child on the day the UK went into 1st lockdown. Many people asked me how my pregnancy was going over the past few months. I'd say: "it's not an easy time to be pregnant!" Most would reply: "it's never an easy time!" Sure... but a pandemic?

I love the NHS. My doctor mother gave all her working life to it, my brother is now set to do the same. This is not a criticism of most of its staff who - long before Covid happened - have been people I championed in many of my columns.

But the major problem over the past nine months has been access to in-person care. Before I was 38 weeks pregnant (technically full term though I didn't deliver until 40 weeks and 6 days), I had seen a midwife in person twice. You can't check blood pressure over the phone.

Nor can you be measured or examined, and the midwife is less able to spot signs of big problems (eg issues like domestic violence, which can start/ flare up in pregnancy). One of my phone appointments lasted about 5 minutes; another I missed because they only called 5 hours late

My husband, the best partner any woman could wish for, wasn't allowed to attend my 12-week or 20 week scan. The 20-week scan did not go perfectly. I was there for 4 hours with my husband sitting outside in the car. They kept repeating it, worried my baby had a hole in his heart

I left the hospital very upset. My mother suggested she pay for me to have a private scan (anathema to her). I had been worried about the cost of doing that. But when I looked into it, there were big delays because women were getting extra scans so their partners could be there.

Anyway, the brilliant NHS delivered here in the end. My mum had been adamant I should give birth in a teaching hospital (thank you @KingsCollegeNHS) and a nurse called saying I should come back. The foetal cardiologist wasn't happy with my scans and he would oversee another one.

That ended up being fine. Staff were great. But the stress had been tough and made so much tougher as my husband hadn't been there. At one appointment I sat next to a woman who had just been diagnosed with gestational diabetes and was crying that she's had to find that out alone.

We were lucky. When I started talking about these issues on here and on the radio many months ago, women contacted me to say they had had to end unviable pregnancies without their partner there or had been told they had lost their babies while on their own.

Kings changed its policy (hooray!) so my husband could come to my 36 week scan (or rather come join us half-way through). But I have often felt that I was doing this all so much more alone than either of us would have liked. Which brings me to the birth and its "aftermath".

My contractions started on sun evening (6th Dec). The labour ward tell you not to come in too early, but I started vomiting and was in intense pain. We got there at 430am and my husband was made to stay outside. I could barely stand or think.

I have never felt more vulnerable than I did in those moments and I needed him there. Thankfully I was v slightly dilated so they decided he was allowed in (I have no idea how long I was on my own since I was in agony).

I won't go into the details of the labour here but the short version is that I eventually had an epidural which unfortunately fell out, leaving me in agony. My husband was the one who spotted what had gone wrong. At other hospitals, he still wouldn't have been in the room...

I gave birth last Tuesday after about 36 hours in labour. I was exhausted and on antibiotics (via a drip) as was my baby. And now I had to start breastfeeding etc.

After birth, Kings has a much more generous visiting policy for pregnant women during Covid than other hospitals. People have told me about still not being able to visit at all. My husband was allowed to be there for 10 hours a day - but that still meant I had 14 hours by myself

The midwives were almost universally wonderful. But it's not the same as having a husband there. I hated having to leave my day-old baby on his own so I could go to the loo, for example.

(I should add that there is a particular weird context here which is that I was trolled a month before I gave birth after a pile-on caused by another hack and received a threat that someone would come to the ward and kill my baby. That was nice...)

I promise this thread is winding up. But one further issue is that it also matters what happens after you are discharged. Partly as I struggled in hospital to breastfeed after a bad (and v long) labour, my baby developed jaundice. I spent Friday night in A&E with a sick baby.

Imagine doing that on your own mere hours after being discharged from hospital and mere days after labour. Thankfully my husband was allowed in (we thought he wouldn't be) because a lovely doctor took the view that I still counted as a patient. I could have kissed her.

Finally I wanted to flag the brilliant work of some people on this issue. @PregnantScrewed have been superstars, as always, as has @stellacreasy and @aliciakearns. And I was thrilled that the brilliant @AVMikhailova took up this issue when she moved to the Mail on Sunday.

My story has a lot more to it: I developed severe pelvic girdle pain and couldn't get physio etc - but really I am now just so happy this guy is here. And I know I am so much luckier than a lot of new parents - who have had an even tougher time during the pandemic.



And a huge, huge thank you to the staff at @KingsCollegeNHS, who are some (a lot!) of the best people I have ever met. I have always loved that hospital.