

Brian Valentine MB, FRCS, FRCOG

The Paddock, 96 High Street, Westham, Pevensey, East Sussex, BN24 5LJ

email: brianvalentine96@hotmail.com phone: 01323 768070

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To The Editor,
Eastbourne Gazette & Herald,
Map House, Kensington Suite,
First floor, 34-36, St Leonards Road,
Eastbourne, East Sussex,
BN21 3UT.

Dear Editor

I write in response to Monica Kavakli's recent letter of exasperation, and the double page spread about the Eastbourne Midwifery-led Unit (EMLU) reporting on its 16 midwives and 261 deliveries. The results of Eastbourne Borough Council's **ONS Survey** of users of East Sussex Maternity Services in 2016, also confirm that mothers were happy with the maternity service received at EMLU. But unfortunately your feature article tells only half a story.

In line with your charter pledge to be open and honest I trust you will publish soon another double page spread with the ONS Survey comments made by mothers using East Sussex Maternity Services in 2016 after reconfiguration. Their personal stories tell what its like to give birth in a busy Maternity Ward away from their home town.

The ONS Survey results also show, 27% of women in 2016 scheduled to give birth at the EMLU, were transferred whilst in labour. Speedy and safe transfer times are known to be at least double that of actual travel time, especially when taking into account the need to urgently assemble professional teams and also liaise with the ambulance service. I am told the memory of such a traumatic experience for parents is something which never leaves them.

The low birth numbers at EMLU are a result of reconfiguration and the removal of a service women rely upon to be available in the event of something unexpected happening when in labour. A further consequence of service removal is a loss of 'customers' and thereby a loss in funding. Both towns and populations were previously well served, and in fact delivery numbers in Eastbourne were significantly increased from 1,400 to 1,800 due to improved morbidity and mortality figures. However, in spite of being considerably better staffed than in the 1980s, when I worked as an Obstetrician there, the Trust failed to provide a 'safe service'. The only way to safely attain the 500 midwifery deliveries wished for in EMLU, and for its full potential to be reached, is to provide full onsite Maternity facilities.

Save the DGH Group formed in 2006 and has consistently campaigned for both Hastings and Eastbourne hospitals to retain high level core services on both sites. I am as distressed by the overworked staff at the Conquest hospital, as by the low birth numbers in Eastbourne. The situation of such differing standards in local Maternity provision is now a postcode lottery. Everyone is grateful for the way staff cope, but people are not fools, and know when a unit and its staff are struggling in adverse conditions. A problem which can only worsen with housing developments across the county.

Public consultation in 2014 before reconfiguration gave no option for mothers to elect to retain an improved consultant-led service. Their only choice was removal of an essential service they needed and wanted. If numbers continue to decline will the service will be removed completely? I think this is the really story behind your headline.

Yours faithfully

Brian Valentine