

Midwives hid truth of baby death

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HEALTH EDITOR

NHS England is to review midwives' investigations into colleagues' mistakes after an official report found the truth about a baby's death was covered up for six years.

The mother of the baby has told how her fight to force the NHS to admit failures in care and take action to prevent other babies being harmed has destroyed her life.

Kate Stanton-Davies died in 2009 after being born at Ludlow's midwife-led unit, part of Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

The birth unit was staffed only by midwives. An inquest ruled that Kate could have survived if she had been born at a hospital staffed by obstetricians. An investigation into the

baby's death was carried out by Angela Hughes, a supervisor of midwives employed by the trust. She concluded that there was "no breach in the duty of care" provided by her midwife colleagues Heather Lort and Delysia Wall.

A report into Hughes's investigation, commissioned by NHS England, completed this month, found the midwife supervisor's investigation was "unfit for purpose".

The NHS England review found key events were not investigated and said Hughes's use of the word "it" for baby Kate was offensive. The report said it was unclear how Hughes could have concluded that there was no breach in the duty of care to the mother, Rhiannon Davies.

After seeing the report, Davies demanded the suspen-

sion of any midwives found to have "contributed to Kate's death and/or covered it up".

The report drew parallels between the failings in the care of Kate and the Morecambe Bay baby death scandal, where significant failures may have contributed to the death of three mothers and 16 babies.

An inquiry into Morecambe Bay found that midwives had behaved like "musketeers" in their defence of each other.

They colluded before inquests by circulating "model answers" to questions and crucial evidence went missing. The inquiry found that midwives distorted the truth.

The NHS England report on Davies and her daughter found poor quality records, retrospective completion of medical notes and conflicting accounts of events. Six and a half years

after Kate died, a fresh investigation of the midwives' conduct has been launched.

This time the inquiry will be conducted by a midwife from outside the trust. Hughes, Lort and Wall all continue to be employed there although disciplinary action is understood to have been taken in response to the NHS England report.

NHS England has pledged a national audit to check whether other midwife supervisors have covered up colleagues' alleged failings.

Davies, from Shropshire, said: "We are glad that we are not still having our hearts broken over and over again with all the awful letters coming through the letter box telling us to go away. But we feel it is way, way too late. We struggled for so long. I honestly feel like my life has been

destroyed by this process... Never mind rebuilding your life after the grief of losing your child but when you have been through 6½ years of emotional torture, where do you start to rebuild your life?"

Kate lay critically ill in the midwife-led unit without any appropriate medical help and died six hours after her birth.

Davies said: "Had the midwife at the unit recognised her condition at birth and called 999 in time Kate would still be here.

"Kate was left in her cold cot in a hypothermic state, grunting, which is a sign of respiratory distress. She was pale, she was making the transition from being all right to being starved of oxygen, to the position of brain damage."

Sarah Bloomfield, director of nursing and quality at Shrews-

bury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, said: "We recognise that the care provided for Ms Davies and her daughter in 2009 failed to meet the high standards we set.

"Furthermore, we recognise that we also fell short in the trust's complaint handling process, and we are truly sorry for the added pain and distress this has caused."

Dr Lynne Wigens, regional chief nurse for NHS England Midlands and East, said: "NHS England now plans to take action and this will include robust auditing of midwifery supervisory investigations compliance."

Reforms have been agreed since the Morecambe Bay scandal so that senior midwives do not have the dual role of supervising and investigating colleagues.