

# 'Toxic' NHS unit at centre of new maternity scandal

Trust comes under fresh scrutiny as further 40 baby and mother deaths or serious injuries reported

By Henry Bodkin

DOZENS of families have come forward with concerns their babies may have been killed or seriously injured at a "toxic" NHS maternity unit accused of being obsessed with natural births.

A Government-ordered review into 23 incidents at the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust (SaTH), known as the Ockenden Review, may be expanded after it emerged an extra 40 cases have been flagged.

The extent of alleged malpractice between 1998 and 2017 threatens a scandal bigger than that of Morecambe Bay, which saw the avoidable deaths of 11 babies and one mother. The latest deaths, those of a mother and two babies, occurred as recently as December last year.

Rhiannon Davies, whose daughter Kate died in 2009 following delivery at SaTH, yesterday described the trust as "defensive" and "unwilling to learn".

"If I were a pregnant lady today about to go into SaTH to have my baby I would be very, very worried," she said.

The trust defended the "continuous improvement" of its maternity service, arguing that only 12 of the 40 additional cases are a cause for concern.

Parents have said they were pressured into natural births in midwife-supervised units, claiming that caesarean

or forceps-assisted deliveries would have prevented brain damage. Some deaths are also blamed on the failure of midwives to properly monitor foetal heart rates and detect infection.

Concerns about the Shrewsbury and Telford maternity unit were raised following the 2009 death of Kate Stanton-Davies. A report found she had died "avoidably" after two midwives failed to realise her birth was high risk and ignored her parents' concerns.

Dozens of parents have come forward since then, including those of

Pippa Griffiths, who died in 2016 from a preventable infection that was not detected by midwives.

In January 2017 Jeremy Hunt, then the Health Secretary, announced that an independent inquiry led by Donna Ockenden, a senior midwife, would examine 23 cases.

But NHS Improvement, the hospital regulator, said yesterday it may broaden its inquiry to consider "anything relevant", including findings from five separate reviews into the maternity unit already undertaken.

Mrs Davies told the BBC she hoped the expanded review would lead to prosecutions where appropriate. "It is unacceptable that this trust is still in denial," she said. "This is an absolutely toxic trust with a failing management."

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesman said: "We take any patient safety concerns extremely seriously. We have asked NHS Improvement to investigate whether further cases at Shrewsbury and Telford should be considered as part of the Ockenden Review."