

Creative animation empowers pregnant women to voice health concerns

April 26 2017

A creative animation, developed as part of a collaboration between King's Improvement Science [KIS] and writer, artist, and facilitator Claire Collinson, is at the heart of a new campaign launched today by Tommy's charity, King's College London and the BabyCentre website to empower pregnant women to overcome fears about speaking to professionals about their health concerns.

Each day in the UK, 10 babies are stillborn and 152 babies are born preterm. A body of research led by Jane Sandall, professor of social science and [women's](#) health at King's College London, and lead of the CLAHRC's maternity and women's health theme, has shown that women's knowledge about their own changing body is invaluable in contributing to safer pregnancies, but that they often struggle to voice their instincts and concerns.

The 'Always ask' campaign centres around two animations (a longer and shorter version) developed out of a project that builds on Professor Jane Sandall's research, which was led by Dr Nicola Mackintosh, formerly a King's Improvement Science fellow at King's College London (now at the University of Leicester). 'The Re-Assure' project brought together women, health professionals, a writer and a digital artist to create an animation that follows a pregnant woman through her [pregnancy](#) journey. It encourages [pregnant women](#) who are worried about their health, or their baby's health, to take their concerns seriously and ask for help.

The film was developed with the help of 34 women who have previously experienced serious complications in pregnancy or birth. It was made with the support of a £10,000 grant from King's College London's Cultural Institute, and co-produced by the women, Nicola Mackintosh, KIS fellow James Harris, writer Claire Collison and animator Patrick Beirne. Professor Jane Sandall was also involved. Fifteen staff – midwives and obstetricians – from maternity services at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contributed.

Trusting your own instincts in pregnancy is an important theme of the 'Always ask' campaign. Pregnancy information often focuses on specific red flag signs and symptoms such as stomach pain or bleeding. Dr Nicola Mackintosh said, 'Our research has shown that many women who seek help for concerns about potential complications in pregnancy and the postnatal period, do not present with 'classic' warning signs and as a result, struggle to have their concerns taken seriously. The wider literature suggests that a change in attitude is often what is required, rather than just the provision of information about specific red flags.'

This is why the 'Always ask' campaign does not talk about specific symptoms; instead it encourages women to trust their instincts and 'look out for changes that don't feel right'. It also gives practical tips on appointments, getting listened to and being taken seriously.

The 'Always ask' campaign has been endorsed by the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and NHS England.

Provided by King's College London

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