

The Maternity Services Rep

The NCT is a charity that exists not only to provide direct services and support to women and their families but also to campaign for improvements in maternity services and to promote informed choice.

A maternity services rep's role is to attend, as an NCT member, meetings of outside bodies working on maternity issues, and to keep up with current changes in the maternity services.

An 'outside body' could include any of the following:

- a campaign to save a maternity unit or service
- a local Maternity Services Liaison Committee (MSLC)
- a community/local health council
- a breastfeeding working group
- an under 8's Forum.

What Does A Maternity Services Rep Do?

Maternity services reps do not need to be active in any other area of the NCT, but quite often they are already antenatal teachers or breastfeeding counsellors and usually sit on their branch committee. Maternity services reps have the support of the NCT's Policy Research and Campaigns Committee (PRCC) which meets 5 - 6 times a year and regular information is provided to them through New Digest. Some NCT maternity services reps chair their local MSLC and frequently set the agenda for these meetings.

Maternity services reps need to be:

- articulate
- well informed
- confident
- knowledgeable on NHS issues
- aware of local maternity services
- keen to participate
- a campaigner
- enthusiastic

A maternity services rep, as the NCT's representative on an outside body, has an influential role to play in a very local arena. Maternity services reps need to be sensitive to the needs of the local population and must do all they can to encourage their health authority or authorities towards best practice in purchasing services which could benefit the community.

The key tasks of a maternity services rep are:

- to represent the NCT on outside bodies
- to campaign for improvements to the experiences of pregnant women
- to influence decisions on maternity services

MSLC's usually meet every 6-8 weeks, normally during the day, with meetings lasting 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours. Two thirds of the committee are health professionals such as consultant obstetricians and directors of midwifery, while lay members such as NCT reps make up the other third.

MSLC reps must:

- attend meetings
- meet with fellow lay members of the committee in advance of the meeting to look at the agenda and to plan to all speak with a similar voice

- read all the relevant paperwork before the meeting
- keep up to date with all national and local maternity issues

A rep can often come to a meeting as well informed as a health professional. This will help her to lobby more effectively for improvements. There are currently around 250 maternity services reps throughout the country sitting on outside bodies.

Training courses for maternity services reps include the 'Voices' training, a specially designed package for reps which includes personal development skills and committee skills, and 'CASP' (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) which teaches maternity services reps about the importance and practical aspects of accessing and using evidence based care.

Half day workshops are also held at some regional days, 3 or 4 times a year.

Rep Backup

All new maternity services reps receive a rep pack full of useful information. They will also find the campaigning pages within New Digest particularly helpful for information, support and details of forthcoming training events. Branches are expected to meet the cost of sending a maternity services rep to a training day but costs are kept as low as possible.

Specific queries or problems can always be addressed directly to your regional link or any other Policy Research and Campaigns Committee member. The names, addresses and telephone numbers of the committee will be included in New Digest. Newly registered maternity services reps can ask a previous local rep to hand on material and discuss local services.

How Do I Become A Maternity Services Rep ?

Contact your local branch committee or UK Office. If you do decide to take on this challenging role, you know you will be fully supported by UK Office, PRCC and your regional and local branch committees.