

# *Edie* the e-midwife

A trust in London has developed an electronic midwife service to maximise women's access to the maternity service.

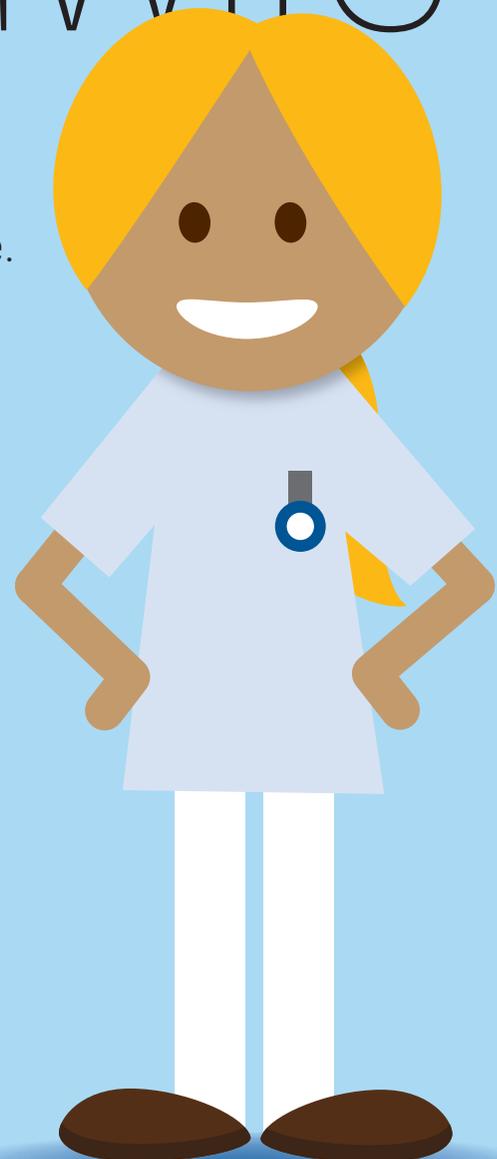
**Giuseppe Labriola** explains more.

**W**HEN A GAP WAS IDENTIFIED IN REACHING the local population, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust decided it needed to think outside the box. Clearly, there was a need to communicate with pregnant women while providing a good-quality service. But this requirement was set against a backdrop of high workload, traditional methods seeming sub-optimal and, of course, tight budgets.

The solution? The introduction of an electronic midwife service – Edie, the e-midwife – to supplement the existing maternity rota model.

It began when the trust spotted a potential gap in service provision to its local population, which is relatively young and not always fully engaging with health care, as well as comprising plenty of women in full-time employment. As the ethos of the maternity unit is to provide a holistic approach to care that centres around women and families, it was keen to develop changes that formed part of the maternity strategy to improve women's experiences.

An action plan was put in place to ensure that the maternity unit was reaching out to the local population in different formats. A senior midwifery manager led, developed and managed the project. After a gap analysis





## CONTACTING EDIE

**100**

- Over 100 contacts a month via email and social media

**30%**

- Just under a third are from women who do not mention their stage of pregnancy

**17%**

- 17% of queries come from those who are less than 14 weeks' pregnant

**18%**

- 18% of queries come from those between 27 and 34 weeks

**7%**

- 7% come from those who are 21 to 26 weeks' pregnant

## MOST POPULAR QUERIES

Antenatal appointments (11)
Abdominal pain (7)
Vaccinations (6)
Private rooms (5)
Tours of unit (5)
Parent education (4)
Maternity certificates (4)
Vaginal discharge (4)

→ was conducted, local needs were identified and plans were put into place.

Service users were asked whether social media should be used as another way to contact the maternity service. The results were very clear – many believed it would help engagement to access the maternity service via email and social media.

This is not surprising. The NHS has failed to move forward in its development of IT systems, and it frequently puts in place systems that are not women-centred. Yet this is often overlooked. The feedback from women and their families is essential to develop services in the right way.

### Getting started

The option of recruiting external consultants was considered, but there was a wealth of experience at the trust that covered all areas of the project development. Every senior member of staff contacted was happy to provide support and lend expertise. For

example, the head of communications provided insight into how the project needed to work closely with the information governance team and helped ensure that the social media campaign was consistent with the trust's vision and values.

Surprisingly, the electronic midwife service is relatively new and nothing has been set up nationally. However, the senior midwifery manager who led the project had set up a similar service at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. He was instrumental in the project delivery.

The trust has been very involved in supporting the service development. It found funding to buy stickers that were placed on maternity notes, as well as pop-up banners and other marketing materials. It also funded an external graphic designer who developed an avatar for the e-midwife. The design was





chosen to reflect a midwife who seemed friendly and approachable, and social media accounts were set up on Facebook and Twitter.

On Facebook, the posts were professional with a focus on being an evidence-based resource for women and other healthcare professionals. On Twitter, the e-midwife had more of a personality, detailing her work as a midwife on the 'shop floor'.

The IT department created an email address so that service users could contact the maternity service. It was set up to enable managers to log into the account easily.

The HoM, managers and matrons gave their input into choosing a name for the e-midwife. After discussion, 'Eddie the e-midwife' was selected because it was catchy and memorable.

### Shaping services

The feedback has been very positive. In fact, many requests have been made for the service to be developed. Maternity staff have viewed the service positively as they realise that it frees midwifery time in clinical areas. Service users have been overwhelmingly positive too, particularly about the social media accounts, which are used much more than emails.

There are currently over 100 contacts a month via email and social media throughout pregnancy. Just under a third are from women who do not mention their stage of pregnancy. While 17% come from those who are less than 14 weeks and those between 27 and 34 weeks account for 18% of queries. The smallest number of contacts – 7% – come from those who are 21 to 26 weeks' pregnant.

When an email is received, an out-of-office message is generated to the sender detailing that the service is for non-urgent advice and that they will receive a response within 48 hours. However, responses are usually sent the same day, or within 24 hours.

All information given in response to service users' queries is evidence based.

The new service has also been instrumental in improving other aspects

## The maternity team said they found the service invaluable in spotting areas for improvement

of maternity care. Following the launch across all of the acute hospital sites, the maternity team said they found the service invaluable in spotting areas for improvement by intercepting complaints and comments on Facebook.

Emails are reviewed and collated on a regular basis so that any common themes, which may emerge, can contribute towards changing how particular services are delivered.

For example, many emails about the content and provision of antenatal classes led to a full review of the service. Numerous emails highlighted the lack of provision for fathers in terms of antenatal classes. As a result of these comments, classes solely for fathers have been provided at maternity services across the trusts since August last year.

The social media routes have also proved popular in shaping new maternity services that were being planned. A midwife-led unit was being developed at one of the hospital sites in Greenwich and, through social media interaction, it received 150 suggestions for naming the new unit, and through Facebook and Twitter women were involved in the unit's design.

The overall success cannot be evaluated fully, because it will take time for the maternity unit to collate the information. But early indications suggest that the service is proving popular, as data for 2014 has already revealed a 100% increase in women accessing the new and innovative service. 

**Giuseppe Labriola**, lead midwife for community services, antenatal services and birth centres, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust



### USERS' PROFILE

The service launched in August 2012. In the first six months, there were 129 queries. These were from:

**119**  
in the antenatal period

**THREE**  
in the postnatal period

**ONE**  
woman in early labour

**THREE**  
women who may not have been pregnant

**ONE**  
student midwife

**ONE**  
member of the public

**ONE**  
medical practice