

‘Why do N.E.S.T. use the term Postnatal Carer instead of Maternity Nurse?’

Sara Travers, Nanny, in conversation with Kate Cranston-Stephens, PNC & Founder of N.E.S.T.

This is not a new question, but in order to answer it, it is necessary to delve back in time and look at the birth of the original maternity nurse or ‘wet nurse’ as she was known then, a common practice in ancient days.

For those unfamiliar with the term, wet nurses provided the necessary nourishment to a newborn whose mother either could not, or chose not to, breastfeed. Common practice as far back as records show, wet nursing only became frowned upon in the last 50 years, coinciding with the mass production of alternative food, namely formula, which was to prove to be a huge economic success for many pharmaceutical companies.

As with most things faced with extinction, the wet nurse metamorphosis into the same brand of carer but without the breastfeeding of another woman’s newborn. As this new type of nurse evolved, so did the role itself and the home nurse who offered maternity care, was born.

This maternity nurse would care for a new mother and the new baby in every aspect until the newborn was ready to be handed over to a nanny to care for full time. The maternity nurse would then move onto another new mother (usually within the same family) and begin the process all over again, ensuring the nanny new exactly what to do before leaving her post. It was a lucrative way to earn a living, preferred by widows who needed to support themselves and their children.

When Florence Nightingale made nursing into a medical profession, the two areas took on separate meanings although the term maternity nurse was maintained.

Over the last 20 years, having spent much of my time in the profession, I have been questioned many times by both healthcare professionals and new mums as to why the word ‘nursing’ is used, suggesting a medical qualification when the majority of those who work as ‘maternity nurses’ have no professional qualification in nursing whatsoever. Hence the term used by us at N.E.S.T. (Newborn Education Services & Training), Post-Natal Carers or PNCs.

Surveying students who had passed through the N.E.S.T. Accredited Course in Post-Natal Care, the general consensus appeared to be that everyone feels more comfortable with the term ‘Post-Natal Carer’. I particularly like the way a very experienced PNC, Carol Augustine, after spending years in the field, put it, ‘I always felt the term maternity nursing suggested I was medically trained when in fact my expertise was offering support, training and care to a ‘new’ mother and her new born baby; there is no misleading medical attachment to the term Post Natal Carer and I feel more comfortable with that’.



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N.E.S.T. is the first accredited training centre in postnatal care and can be found on www.babyeducation.co.uk 01494 431720