LIGHTING THE WAY FOR BIRTH: ENVIRONMENT AND BIRTH

Dr Kathryn Gutteridge • Independent Consultant Midwife • Twitter @Sanctummid

It is no surprise to me that when women are in a safe and secluded environment, they will both labour and generally birth well. I have long known this from hearing our neighbour's daughter labouring at home when I was just 12 years old.

During my career, I was very fortunate to be able to design three birthing centres where the environment, including low lighting, featured highly in their success. Odent¹ describes mammals needing low light and quiet for their *optimal* hormone production around the time of birth.

IMPACT ON THE BIRTHING PERSON

I wrote an article some years ago about the effects of the environment on the pathophysiology of birth.² I researched environments in healthcare and palliative care where attention is paid to the needs of the whole person. I was particularly interested in a Dutch system of care for dementia patients called 'Snoezelen'. This is an amalgamation of the words 'sniff and doze'; Baker et al.³ wrote about these design features having a soothing impact on those with severe forms of dementia.

More recent research from Denmark analysed the risk of obstetric interventions and complications labouring in sensory delivery rooms with spectral light settings compared with the light settings in the standard delivery rooms. This study included 806 women randomly selected in a standard delivery room or a sensory light room. The findings showed that women who were in the sensory birth rooms were less likely to require oxytocin infusion for augmentation; those women requiring a category one caesarean section were 9% compared to 10.7% in the standard delivery room.



I was very fortunate to be able to design three birthing centres where the environment, including low lighting, featured highly in their success



IMPACT ON THE MIDWIFE

In these days of midwifery shortages and high-stress levels in the maternity workplace, it's worth noting that Hammond et al.⁵ showed that when a birthing space is changed to promote the production of oxytocin, both the woman and her midwife benefit from the space. Increased levels of oxytocin affect our neurophysiology; midwives are strongly influenced by birth rooms in negative and positive ways. 6 Indeed, Andrén et al. 7 showed a strong correlation between women and midwives' level of trust, supportive relationships and satisfaction levels of both. This should not be surprising to us; when we are in an environment where noise is low, lighting is dimmed and all our safety needs are met, we are relaxed and at ease. Hammond et al.⁶ noted that midwives' practice and confidence improve in these spaces; they are more open, approachable and generally happier in their work. This evidence should be considered for other areas of maternity too, such as clinic rooms and waiting areas.

As midwives, we have a duty to consider the space that women give birth in. Small changes in lighting and environment that can optimise a woman's labour is surely a change that we would all want to see. This is so important as we must support our colleagues in every way we can as they strive to care for women and their babies. **TPM**

REFERENCES

- 1. Odent M. Primal Health. London: Century Hutchinson; 1986.
- 2. Walsh D, Gutteridge K. Using the birth environment to increase women's potential in labour. MIDIRS Midwifery Digest. 2011;21(2):143-147.
- 3. Baker R, Dowling Z, Wareing LA, Dawson J, Assey J. Snoezelen: Its long-term and short-term effects on older people with dementia. Br J Occup Ther. 1997;60(5):213-218.
- 4. Wrønding T, Argyraki A, Petersen JF, et al. The aesthetic nature of the birthing room environment may alter the need for obstetrical interventions an observational retrospective cohort study. Sci Rep. 2019;9:303. doi:10.1038/s41598-018-36416-x.
- 5. Hammond A, Foureur M, Homer CS, Davis D. Space, place and the midwife: exploring the relationship between the birth environment, neurobiology and midwifery practice. Women Birth. 2013;26(4):277-281. doi:10.1016/j.womb i.2013.09.001.
- 6. Hammond A, Homer CSE, Foureur M. Friendliness, functionality and freedom: Design characteristics that support midwifery practice in the hospital setting. Midwifery. 2017;50:133-138. doi:10.1016/j.midw.2017.03.025.
- 7. Andrén A, Begley C, Dahlberg H, Berg M. The birthing room and its influence on the promotion of a normal physiological childbirth a qualitative interview study with midwives in Sweden. Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being. 2021;16(1):1939937. doi:10.1080/17482631.2021.1939937.

CROYDE ENVIRONMENTAL MOOD LIGHTING



CROYDE STARRY SKY CEILINGS

Croyde Starry Sky Ceilings are available in a wide range of designs and colours. Popular above birthing pools, in low-risk active birth rooms and bereavement suites, they create a distracting visual experience and focal point within the room.

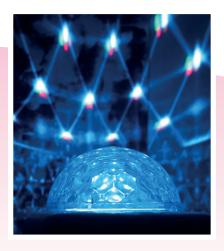
LED lights, designed to twinkle like a night sky and RGB edge lighting softly illuminate the ceiling. We can create ceilings to match the shape and size of your birthing pool or bed below, aligning the two products' form and function.



CROYDE MOOD TUBE

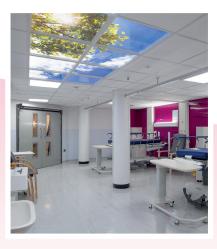
A beam of LED light creates a soft and peaceful environment as it automatically cycles through a range of colours.

Simply plug in - zero maintenance.



CROYDE LIGHT CRYSTAL

Cycles through a world of colours for a sensory experience. Patterns of light produce a relaxing display. Place in the corner to shine brightly on a wall surface.



CROYDE LED SKY PANELS

Visually stunning, backlit and dimmable to create the desired mood and available in a wide range of day and night sky images.



CONTACT US

Tel: 01367 241194 Email: info@croydemedical.co.uk www.croydemedical.co.uk "The mood tube is a lovely, calming feature. The women love birthing their babies in this room now."

Birth Centre Manager Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport