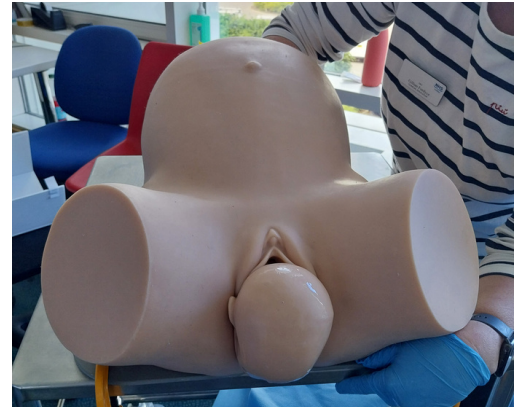




Reducing the risk of birthing tears with the help of simulation training

To help reduce the incidence of severe perineal tears for women during childbirth, NHS Lothian Charity provided £12,220 to purchase a highly realistic birthing simulator, a baby ('Sophie'), and her maternal model ('mum'). The lifelike training tools provide maternity staff such as midwives and doctors with a realistic, hands-on experience of childbirth, enabling them to practice manual perineal protection to support safer births and contribute to efforts to reduce the risk of Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries (OASI).



Clinical Educator simulating Sophie's birth

What Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries (OASI) are and why it's important to reduce them

During childbirth, the perineum (the area of tissue between the vagina and anus) stretches as the baby is born. While minor tears are common, some women experience a more severe tear known as a 3rd or 4th degree tear, also called an Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury (OASI). These can require surgery, a longer recovery period, and may have lasting effects on a woman's health and wellbeing. Reducing perineal tears is a priority for the maternity team in Lothian, so a focused improvement programme, aligned with national best practice, was introduced with the aim of bringing OASI rates in line with the national average by 2027. Gillian, Clinical Educator, explains how Sophie and her mum play a key role in supporting this work:

"Maternity staff can lack confidence in applying OASI prevention techniques due to limited practical experience. I did a lot of research in what model to purchase and what makes Sophie and her mum different is that it's the only with one that has a perineum so provides the opportunity to deliver accurate and lifelike training that benefits staff to reduce the risk of OASI in birthing women."

250

staff members and students on placement completed OASI simulation training using Sophie and her mum in the first 6 months.

Improved confidence, skills and ability to manage OASI

97%

of staff agreed they felt more confident to manage OASI in practice after the simulation training.

97%

of staff agreed they felt better equipped to manage OASI in practice after the simulation training.

94%

of staff agreed their worries about managing OASI decreased as a result of the simulation training.



Having this training and using the models has helped me build my confidence."

-Midwife



I now feel more confident using the OASI technique."

-Midwife



I feel more comfortable when I qualify if I need to carry out an episiotomy and feel more confident when to do one."

-Student Midwife



This affects my everyday practice positively as I am now looking forward to applying what I have learned, no longer feel anxious."

-Midwife

How simulation training supports professional development

Traditionally, education on OASI is delivered through a combination of university teaching, mandatory professional training such as online learning and workplace-based learning but evidence shows that 'simulation training leads to better performance and improved patient safety compared with traditional educational methods'. This was reflected in the feedback shared by maternity staff who undertook training with Sophie and her mum.

100%

of staff agreed simulation training is more effective than traditional types of training.

Realistic element of simulation

Participants consistently highlighted that simulation training felt more realistic. The use of lifelike Sophie and her mum helped bring theory to life and allowed learners to experience procedures in a way that closely resembled real clinical practice.

 Really good mannequin and doll, felt very realistic and was helpful to feel things more realistically, 100% better than other types of training."

-Midwife

Hands-on, practical learning

Many participants described practical learning as being considerably more effective than reading or classroom-based teaching. Being able to physically perform techniques themselves helped bridge the gap between theory and practice.

 This is hands-on, practical and helps me prepare for such scenarios in the future."

-Midwife

Space for practice and feedback

Participants valued the opportunity to learn in a supportive environment where they could ask questions, make mistakes, and receive immediate feedback without harm to patient safety.

 Helps practice in a safe environment where you can ask questions not under normal pressures."

-Midwife

Refreshing and updating practice

Experienced midwives described the simulation training as a valuable way to refresh their knowledge, stay-up to-date with current practice, and ensure a consistent approach across NHS Lothian.

 This serves as a refresher course to stay updated on the practices of the job."

-Midwife

 Good impact on practice and use of doll for delivery very helpful as more realistic."

-Midwife

Thanks to Gillian and the team for supporting this evaluation. Sophie and her mum will continue to support maternity staff on the unit with training in OASI and other relevant practice. Find out other ways [NHS Lothian Charity supports staff wellbeing and professional development](#).

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity