

## **DR GWYNETH LEWIS**

Pro-Chancellor,

Dr Gwyneth Lewis is an eminent member of the medical profession, and the Government's National Clinical Leader for Maternal Health and Maternity Services. She helped to write *Maternity Matters*, the national strategy for the future development of maternity care, and was part of Lord Darzi's recent review of NHS services. Dr Lewis also directs the UK Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths, an audit project which has been instrumental in saving the lives of many mothers and babies, and she leads international campaigns to improve maternity care.

Science was in Gwyneth Lewis's family, so it was no surprise when she went from Oxford High School for Girls to University College Hospital Medical School. She started medical life as a surgeon but the onset of arthritis led to a change of direction, first into general practice and later into obstetrics and public health, professions in which she has risen to the very top. As the Department of Health's National Clinical Leader for Maternal Health and Maternity Services she visits NHS maternity services and listens to the views of mothers and staff in order to advise Ministers and Government departments on maternal health matters. She has been a major influence and driving force in developments to modernise maternity services in England, giving mothers more choice, and making care provision safer, more family focused and accessible. Her top priorities are to press continuously for flexible services which meet the needs of all mothers and babies, and to reduce the inequalities which affect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Last year Lord Darzi was asked by the Government to review the NHS and propose a new framework for its development. Dr Lewis helped to lead the review's discussions on maternity and the health of new-born infants. She had already helped to develop and write a national strategy document with the title *Maternity Matters*; Lord Darzi's final report in June 2008 confirmed this strategy, which has now been adopted as the basis for future maternal health provision in the NHS.

For 20 years Gwyneth Lewis has also been Director and Editor of the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom (CEMACH), which carries out nationwide confidential reviews of all deaths of mothers in pregnancy, childbirth and up to a year afterwards. The results are published every three years in the seminal reports entitled *Saving Mothers' Lives*. These reports are a vital source of intelligence for doctors, midwives and midwifery students, and for public health leaders and providers; and they are regarded as a 'gold standard' to which other countries aspire. Dr Lewis has made very significant personal contributions to these investigations and reports: for example, social factors such as domestic abuse are now taken more widely into account, and the development of modern perinatal mental health services owes much to her influence and leadership. Through her numerous publications and contributions to conferences and seminars she

ensures that these and other issues are well understood among public health policy-makers and providers.

Gwyneth's expertise and achievements have brought her high international esteem. The World Health Organisation, the Commonwealth Secretariat, United States Aid organisations and other international bodies regularly call on her to help in the development of maternity services in the developing world. She is a member of the International Advisory Group of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which supports strategic action to improve reproductive health worldwide and to reduce maternal mortality in developing countries. A courageous and determined advocate and campaigner, she is driven by the stark fact that one million women and six million babies die in or soon after childbirth each year. 'It isn't rocket science', she says: 80 per cent of those deaths can be prevented at little or no additional cost. With the writer Brigid McConville she directed and produced *My Sister, My Self*, an award-winning film about maternal health in the developing world, which graphically shows how motherhood can be made safe through commitment to health care services and education. This film, which is regarded as a world leader of its kind, has been shown in venues ranging from village gatherings with generator-powered projectors to global health summits and United Nations meetings. Gwyneth is also a regular lecturer on public health Masters programmes around the world, and representatives of 52 countries have attended the regional workshops she organizes for the World Health Organisation. As a result most of these countries have introduced maternal and new-born health review programmes.

All these and many other outstanding achievements have been widely recognized by high awards and distinctions, including Fellowships of the Faculty of Public Health, and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, both awarded for excellence. The UK Chief Medical Officers have praised Gwyneth for her courage, commitment, dedication, and 'insightful innovations'. In 2006 the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood gave her its Woman of the Year award in recognition of her 'outstanding commitment to mothers and babies globally' and her international advocacy work.

Gwyneth Lewis's purpose, and her lasting achievement, is in advocating and enabling policies for safe, compassionate, inclusive, equitable and woman-centred maternity services to meet the needs of all mothers and babies. Internationally, her powerful influence continues to improve maternal health care and reduce inequalities in the poorest places of the world. Her highly distinguished career shows compellingly how, in her own words, 'little changes bring big rewards'.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Dr Gwyneth Lewis, and ask you to confer upon her the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.