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Protecting the public: An investigation of midwives' perceptions of regulation and the regulator

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The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of a group of midwifery registrants about the influence of regulation and the regulatory body, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, on the practice of midwives in the United Kingdom. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods which included an online survey and semi-structured interviews to explore the views and opinions of a cohort of midwives working in both urban and rural practice settings within the South East of England. 132 participants took part in the online survey which achieved a 70% response rate as a result, whilst 20 midwives participated in the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was utilized to examine the data from both the online survey and the semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that midwives were generally supportive of the need to regulate practice; however, some participants had an uneasy relationship with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and claimed to practice defensively, due to a fear that they could be removed from the register, and believed the regulator to be remote and punitive. For other participants concerns were raised about fitness to practice procedures, particularly in terms of decision making. Importantly the participants felt that in order for midwifery regulation to be effective the regulator needs to have detailed knowledge and appreciation of the role of the midwife, and the needs of the pregnant woman.