

Inquiry into the administration of health practitioner registration by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)

I write as a midwife to comment on the inquiry into the AHPRA.

I currently work in a large public hospital in a midwifery group practice and have done so for over 10 years, but have in the past worked as a private practice midwife providing home-birth services. I have been a midwife for over 20 years.

- I am mainly writing to express my concern at the current process for dealing with complaints made against private practice midwives and what appears to be a “guilty until proved innocent approach”. Unfortunately at times hospital staff can be highly critical and punitive towards private practice midwives and or their clients when women transfer in for care from labouring at home. It is incredibly unjust to punish a midwife by placing very restrictive limits on her practice whilst a complaint is awaiting review or investigation, particularly as previous experience has shown these complaints can at times be vexatious. Until the matter has been properly reviewed and it has been determined if the midwife acted in an unsafe or unprofessional way she is still entitled to continue her care of women within her practice.
- My other concern is actually the AHPRA itself and its capacity to process such complaints. Having closely watched the changes that have come about since the productivity commissions review into health practitioner regulation to where we are now with the new AHPRA I have doubts regarding the capacity of AHPRA deal with any complaints in a timely, efficient and proper way.
- This whole new situation of regulation has been established in great haste without sufficient funding and it is very concerning that this is the body responsible for protecting the public to ensure health practitioners are of the highest standard. We want to have confidence any complaints process is of a high standard for patient safety but is also fair and just for practitioners.
- Throughout this time of establishment and now it is underway; it has been almost impossible to gain any response to phone calls or emails regarding registration queries from AHPRA. I noted with wry amusement the recent press coverage regarding Doctors concerns about their registration and AHPRA’s lack of ability to deal with them. Nurses and Midwives (and I would speculate other professions) have had these same concerns for many months. Perhaps now Doctors have issues things may improve?
- Whilst my most recent registration was done through the Agency’s on-line process and went through without a problem, the professional questionnaire associated with re-registration did not address a number of issues regarding practice matters which would give the Agency and government useful information about the midwifery profession and workforce. I did email the Agency to outline my concerns but as usual did not get a response or even an acknowledgement they received the email.

I value the Senates inquiry into these matters and hope the information you receive can improve the situation.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Hall