

Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2005 - Submission for Senate enquiry

Submission by: Geraldine Robertson, Secretary, Women's Web Inc.

10th October 2005

We wish to address 'the provisions of the Bill relating to new powers to set conditions, limitations and restrictions on the circumstances in which Medicare benefits will be payable for health services; in particular to: a. consider the evidence that these powers are necessary.'

If used to prevent Medicare benefits for services such as abortion, we submit this restriction to access is not only unnecessary, it is damaging to Australian women and their families

Women's Web - Women's Stories, Women's Actions www.womensweb.com.au publishes the 'stories' and 'actions' of women working for social justice in Melbourne. We submit the following from the 'Abortion' page of the 'Actions' section for your consideration:

In our time, it was such a risky thing if you couldn't deal with a pregnancy. I was in the Women's Hospital for three weeks with what they called a *missed abortion*. The foetus had developed to ten weeks and then stopped, but I didn't abort. There wasn't the technology then to confirm that this had happened then so we tried to maintain the pregnancy.

For two weeks I was in the abortion ward. Everything that was a miscarriage, whether spontaneous or induced, went there. It even had a padded cell. I was the healthiest person in the ward and it was horrific. It was absolutely horrific.

You would wake up in the night to find doctors and nurses around a woman who had obviously induced an abortion and was in strife - hemorrhaging and septicaemia and so forth. You would go back to sleep and the next morning when you woke up, the woman would be gone - another woman dead.

There was one woman in there who was in a terrible situation. She was young, she had two children and couldn't cope with a third. When she told her doctor how they had no money, could not cope and couldn't afford this pregnancy and couldn't cope with another child, her doctor

apparently said he would send her to the Women's Hospital where she would get help. He actually sent her there because he knew they would keep her in so she couldn't induce an abortion.

There was a woman in the padded cell - a migrant woman. I don't know what had happened there. Being in there was the worst experience of my life.

Geraldine Robertson