

I wish to provide my support to the right to choose homebirth with a midwife in private practice. I am not writing this from a point of ignorance nor unrealistic idealism. I am both a mother and a midwife currently practicing in a public hospital setting in the birthing suite. Having come from New Zealand where I was able to practice midwifery from a point of view that the women must be given all her birthing options of which homebirth is certainly a safe and viable choice I was at first saddened and now angry that women will now only have this available to them in Australia by risking unattended home birth situations unsupported by a midwife. Midwives are not nurses who assist doctors in childbirth. Midwives are experts in normal birth while doctors are often minimally trained in normal birth with a focus on complicated or abnormal birth. Most doctors do not know what normal birth is and see birthing as needing to be managed. Women in Australia are herded to GP doctors and Obstetrician clinics thinking they are doing the safest thing for themselves and their unborn babies by choosing this care. Private obstetricians generally practice through the private hospital system which has of recent decades seen the rate of caesarian births escalate to the point where women think this is normal birth.

Normal birth is becoming sidelined as more women in the community are brainwashed into thinking they cannot birth without drugs and intervention. The media enjoys feeding the misinformation and pitting staunch Obstetricians against stories of women who birth at home unattended by anyone because they are too frightened to give birth in hospital and unaware that midwives are the medical professional who can attend birth in any setting. Midwives who are registered, have their practice supervised by the attending professional body and practices within their scope of clinical practice can safely attend homebirths, birthing centers, private and public hospital births and indeed are the only medical professional present in all settings.

I was unable to choose homebirth myself due to medical reasons but still happily gave birth in a public hospital setting with only midwives present. If I have another child I would also look into a homebirth option. However, due to the way Australia has structured birthing services I will struggle to find a homebirthing midwife let alone a midwife that can afford the impractical high costs of insurance cover. And now those few remaining homebirth midwives are at risk of being lost as the government does not support an affordable insurance for a professional that does not earn a 6+ figure income.

With birthing services being lost as these are centralized to major hospitals more women are risking giving birth on the motorways trying to get to a hospital. This is infinitely more dangerous with no one with knowledge attending them, no equipment present (homebirthing midwives carry infant resuscitation equipment) and in all weather often in the back of the family car. How is this safe?

I have family members who have given birth to children at home and close friends who have had homebirth with a midwife. I used to be an attending homebirth midwife. I know when this is safe and when it is not. There are times when homebirthing is not a safe option for some women and midwives know that not all women are able to have normal birth and the safest options for some is certainly a hospital birth (vaginal or caesarian birth) supervised by an Obstetrician.

Midwives need to be able to access affordable insurance in order that homebirthing does not become a dangerous birth option. Please support midwives.

Gwen Prattley

Registered Nurse and Midwife