

I am writing to strongly urge that the Federal Government arrange for trained and registered midwives to access indemnity insurance and Medicare and to continue to be able to attend homebirths beyond 1 July 2010.

I am expecting my second child in September and have engaged an independent midwife to be my primary health carer and attend my planned homebirth. I have made this decision based on research and my desire to improve upon the healthcare and support I received during the labour and birth of my first child at a private hospital in November 2007.

Due to a low risk first pregnancy, I planned and prepared for as natural and intervention-free a birth as possible. The obstetrician on duty at the hospital the weekend I went into labour (not my own) showed little interest or respect for me in general or for my requests for minimal unnecessary examinations and interventions. For example, despite my daughter not being in distress, the obstetrician disregarded my request to start with a low level Syntocinon injection to augment the labour (also overriding the attending midwife's opinion). The obstetrician also performed an episiotomy on me without seeking my consent, prior to delivering my daughter using forceps. I ended up with third degree tearing and damage to the nerve endings near my bladder, which limited my bladder control for months after the birth.

Based on my experience, I realise how important it is to have access to a health carer who supports and respects the mother, baby and father during labour and birth. I do not wish to subject myself and my unborn child to the vagaries of whoever happens to be on shift at a public or private hospital when I next give birth. This is why I have chosen to engage an independent trained and registered midwife whom I trust, have developed a good relationship with, and who supports and respects my preference for minimal intervention if all things are going well. I also base my decision on research showing that homebirth is just as safe as birth in hospital, results in fewer interventions and higher satisfaction ratings by mothers.

I was very impressed that the Federal Government decided to introduce a paid maternity leave scheme, but find it perplexing that the same government would choose to limit women's choices by effectively making it illegal for trained and registered midwives to attend homebirths. I find it very hard to understand why Australian women should accept less choice than women in countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, where homebirth services are publicly funded and supported. Presumably these developed countries with advanced medical systems made the decision to support such a choice for sound reasons. In what respects does the Australian government differ? I urge the government to provide support for homebirth attended by trained and registered midwives, so that women and children have an opportunity to obtain the care, respect and support they desire.

Regards,

Belinda Barnett