

Dr Veronica Moule

The Honourable Nicola Roxon, MP  
Minister for Health and Ageing  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2601

14 July 2009

Dear Minister Roxon,

I am a GP Obstetrician who works in a small rural hospital, providing obstetric care to low-risk women in a birthing-centre-like situation.

I work in a town that has a high rate of homebirth, approximately 20/year. As one of only 2 GPs practicing obstetrics, I provide GP services and antenatal support to many of these families.

In the past few years I have had several consultations with women planning on free-birthing, and through discussion of the risks and safety issues for babe and mum, they have accepted midwifery care in their home. On one of these occasions the babe's cord was tight around the neck at birth, and required professional care to assist the delivery. The mother's reflections on her birth were of being thankful for the help being there, and still of not wanting to have been in hospital.

We do provide a low-intervention model of care at our local hospital. Despite this, there are significant numbers of women concerned with losing their autonomy, being defined by hospital protocols, and falling victim to a cascade of intervention if they fall outside the protocols (even when they are still within what they consider is safe and normal).

I think the main issue of concern is the legislation that effectively makes homebirth illegal. I have no doubt that women in my community will continue to have homebirths, regardless of the legality, either 'free-birthing' without professional care, or 'underground' with an independent midwife.

I am concerned about a probable rise in free-birthing in our community, and having to deal with complications that may present at the hospital; most likely at a late stage, and without adequate clinical notes.

I am concerned for the long-term mental health of women and families being forced into an unwanted model of care based on legislation rather than clinical need.

I am concerned that providing health services to these families in the future may mean I am inadvertently breaking the law when I become aware of their place of birth.

Yours sincerely

Dr Veronica Moule MBBS (Hons), DRACOG, FRACGP