

Mrs LouisaNg

16 July 2009

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Moore

Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I am writing to express my concern about the above Bills – specifically, the exclusion of homebirth from the funding and indemnity arrangements contained in these Bills.

I believe that it is unacceptable to exclude homebirth from the proposed funding and indemnity arrangements as it would deprive women the freedom to choose from a full range of birthing options. This exclusion would also result in Australia being out of step with countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand, which all support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their respective national health schemes. Notably, New Zealand and UK women are provided a legislative right to choose homebirth.

I gave birth to my son, my first child, at home on 15 July 2008. I was originally following the standard obstetric/private hospital model of care but after several weeks of research, I was shocked to read the Victorian and Australian statistics regarding interventions in both private and public hospitals. I found it equally astounding to be told that even though my pregnancy was categorized as “low risk”, my obstetrician still considered that I had a 20% chance of having a birth by cesarean section. This seemed to totally contradict the recommendation of the WHO that Western countries have a cesarean rate of no more than 10% across the board. It seemed to me that modern medical technology in the area of obstetrics has been hindering the natural birth process in many cases, and actually causing many of the problems it originally intended to prevent.

After undertaking more research I discovered that countries in Northern Europe, such as the Netherlands, which have a high rate of home births (around 30% of births) also have a low rate of interventions, and low infant and maternal mortality rates. As a result, at 20 weeks I finally decided to have a home birth with two experienced independent midwives in attendance, and had hoped to continue seeing my obstetrician up until the time of the birth in case any obstetric complications arose. When I told my obstetrician of my decision to modify my birth plan, he refused to see me any further. I found his attitude very disappointing, unsupportive and archaic.

My home birth was fantastic. While in pre-labour one of my midwives came to my house to assess my progress. When in established labour, both midwives were in attendance

for the duration of the labour and for two hours after the birth. My son was born in water after a 6.5 hour labour. He had an apgar score of 9 at birth and 10 at five minutes. Breast feeding was established immediately, and has continued without a problem. He is thriving and is in the 75th percentile for weight and length, and the 50th for head circumference. I had no drugs during the labour, no internal examinations, no interventions, no episiotomy, no tears or stitches, and my pelvic floor strength returned within a couple of days. My recovery was fast, and I have experienced no post-natal depression.

The benefits of supporting home births for low risk pregnancies include the following:

- lowering of intervention rates, including cesarian sections;
- easing of pressure on the health system (cost, availability of beds, access to obstetricians etc...);
- easing of pressure on private obstetricians so that they can care for women with true obstetrical issues;
- higher rates of long-term breast feeding (which improves babies' health, and lowers their propensity to develop obesity at a later age);
- lower rates of post-natal depression;
- happier mothers and babies.

Since our son's birth, my husband and I continually tell ourselves how lucky we are to have had the opportunity to see him born in the calm and secure atmosphere of our own home. In hindsight, we should have decided on a homebirth from the very beginning, and feel very strongly that homebirth in Australia should be encouraged.

I have been thinking long and hard about what I would do if it becomes illegal for me to have a homebirth for subsequent children. The only option I feel that I have if I want an intervention-free birth is to birth at home unattended. I fear that there are other women who will voluntarily assume this risk because of this proposed legislation.

I support a healthcare system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection. I would also like to see the development of a national homebirth policy, and active encouragement of homebirth in the Australian healthcare system.

Yours sincerely

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