

10<sup>th</sup> July 2009  
Kiersten Quinn

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senator Moore

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

I write to express my concern about the above bills. I understand that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

I feel like it is important to relate my personal story as my homebirth story is one which highlights the safety of planning a homebirth and receiving care from an independent midwife. I had the highest level of care throughout my pregnancy last year. My midwife visited my partner and I in our home for prenatal visits throughout my pregnancy. Thanks to her high level of skill, guidance and professionalism I was able to prevent early pre-eclampsia from progressing by making some simple health and lifestyle changes.

At our midwife's suggestion we attended the hospital for a monitor when I was 40 + 10 days pregnant. All was well and so an obstetrician suggested we go home and continue to wait. He praised the good care I had been receiving and was encouraging about our plans to birth at home. We were thrilled when I went into labor naturally and spontaneously. Labor progressed slowly but surely in the beautiful and calm surrounds of our family home. Two independent midwives were in attendance but they felt more like friends. As things progressed, it became apparent that my son's head was presenting to be born but he was not moving down with the contractions and pushing, after some time. My husband, midwives and I discussed what we thought was the best plan taking into consideration the observations of the midwives and my feeling about the position of the baby etc. We all agreed it was time to transfer to hospital. One midwife called an ambulance as I was past a stage where car transfer would be appropriate. The other midwife did some cleaning up and dishes! My husband changed his clothes, the ambulance arrived, I walked out, hopped in and was transferred to the nearest public hospital.

The registrar examined me, unsuccessfully tried to manually turn my baby, observed my pushing contractions for a few minutes, ordered some syntocinon and the vacuum. She tried two unsuccessful vacuum extractions before she said that we would need to consider forceps or c-section. Throughout this experience, the people closest to me were my husband and two

midwives. In a situation that could have felt completely chaotic, and traumatic I felt well informed and supported to do what my body needed to do to birth my baby or to make decisions that would impact on both of our lives. The Registrar referred to the Consultant who insisted on c-section. We signed forms and I was prepared for the surgery. The epidural was tricky, especially since I had been given drugs to make me contract harder and then I had to sit perfectly still for the epidural. Eventually the anesthetist got someone else to do it as he couldn't manage it. It seemed like only a moment before I was in surgery with my husband by my side as a big baby boy was passed over the screen. We were elated! My husband burst into tears and he went with our baby son. I obviously stayed where I was to get stitched up and the midwife in attendance showed me pictures of her children from her phone. I couldn't believe that I had a baby now too. I was over the moon and couldn't wait to hold him in my arms and be together as a family.

So my story is not a typical homebirth story and perhaps for this reason it is all the more important for people to hear as there are so many ridiculous misconceptions and urban myths about women refusing medical help to the detriment of their health and the health of their children. It is so frustrating to hear people talk about homebirth as unsafe because 'there are women who will persist and not transfer' as I heard one medical practitioner say on a television program a few months ago. I want to shout out: 'Are you insane? What about my story? When you plan a homebirth, you book into the hospital because it is there if you need it.'

My story could easily have been a traumatic one but my husband and I have felt unerringly positive about my experience. For one important reason: my choices were respected. I never felt like my body was out of my control. I felt strong and confident about what my body could do and what my choices were once I was in hospital. I had all the support and strength I needed to cope thanks to my husband but especially my independent midwives who were skillful and professional, caring and compassionate. Safe.

I will plan a homebirth again in the future. For these reasons: I am confident about my body, my choices and my carers.

I feel sorry for the women who don't have that confidence because it has either been: outsourced to the health system, taken away or they don't know it exists. Now there is a good topic for an inquiry!

Yours sincerely

Kiersten Quinn