

11th July 2009
Kelly James

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Via E-mail: 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.

Whilst Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue, it's not fair on mothers or private practicing midwives for homebirth to be excluded from this funding and indemnity arrangement.

I gave birth to our son, Jesse, in December 2008 at home. The wonderful experience of welcoming him into our own home is one I wish to go through when we have our next child, and this will not be possible with the proposed changes to public indemnity insurance for midwives. I would like to share with you our experience within the public system compared to that which we had with our midwife to illustrate why this is so important to me and any other woman that wants the right to choose to birth at home with a privately practicing midwife.

At the beginning of my pregnancy my husband and I visited the hospital after seeing our GP - as one usually does. We were referred to the local hospital and had an appointment with a midwife, who gave us an overwhelming amount of information in a short period of time. At the end of the appointment, I asked when we would see her again and she told us that we wouldn't see her at all, that our next visit would be towards the end of the pregnancy with an obstetrician and then the appointment after that with another midwife, who may or may not be the one there at the birth!

I, like many other first time Mums, had a healthy fear of the prospect of giving birth – there are so many negative stories out there about the 'inevitable' pain of labour and birth. The fact that I would not have continuity of care for the pregnancy from one main person whom I trusted was terrifying for me as I did not have the support of nearby female friends or family to rely on. The antenatal classes that we attended at the hospital were confronting and did nothing to help me feel that labour was a normal, natural event, and possible to endure without the help of drugs

I left the hospital each visit in tears – I was frustrated that we seemed to be just another number in the public system, appointments seemed rushed and it felt like we were being shunted from one health professional to another. I didn't feel that I could ask the questions that I needed answered, because things were rushed and I didn't get a chance to build a trusting relationship with any one person before seeing a different person.

We turned to the internet to try and get some answers, and discovered a private midwife practicing in Toowoomba, Sonya Beutel. We attended her weekend course on Active Birthing – and our eyes were opened to what a wonderful experience birth *could* be. She helped the first time Mums in the class feel more comfortable about the prospect of giving birth, we went away with knowledge on how to actively manage the labour other than relying on drugs (the word 'pain' was never once used), and speaking for my husband and myself, we came away with renewed strength in our relationship.

We decided to book Sonya as our midwife, with weekly antenatal visits, and the intention of having her attend the birth in hospital in a supportive role. Over the weeks that we saw Sonya, we experienced a level of care that goes above and beyond anything that we had expected. She offered a holistic approach that supported us not only physically, but emotionally too. No question was too silly for her to answer, and we were never made to feel ridiculous for asking. The real surprise for us was that my husband received so much support as well, which is something that I believe to be very important – often Dads are left out – and this helped him to be an effective support for me during the labour and birth.

My husband and I are educated people, we believe ourselves to be intelligent and cautious. We deliberated long and hard over whether or not to have a home birth. As the birth approached, I became more and more worried about having our baby in hospital. Based on what I had seen and experienced during our visits I was not comfortable that we would receive the level of attention I would expect when delivering our first child. We researched homebirth at length, and spoke to other families that had had their children at home with Sonya. We were impressed with Sonya's midwifery qualifications including extensive experience in paediatrics, and the positive birth outcomes that she had achieved whilst in private practice.

The birth of our son, in our own home, is an experience that I would describe as beautiful, empowering, uplifting, relaxing and even fun. During the labour and birth, Sonya maintained the utmost professionalism and respect for us as parents. She supported and encouraged me through a drug free labour, and I am so grateful that she was there for both myself and my husband through the pregnancy, birth and even now into parenthood.

The midwives that are enabling women to choose to give birth at home deserve to be recognised as the dedicated medical professionals that they are. They have an enormous impact on the lives they touch, and their loss would be a loss to women Australia wide.

The implementation of the health legislation amendment at the same time as the requirement for national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I would encourage you to take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I feel that this would be a huge leap in the direction of providing safe, high-quality maternity care in a system that values the rights of mothers to choose their place and approach to giving birth.

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

Yours sincerely



Kelly James

The joy of home birth – me and Jesse, minutes after his birth (right)



A rewarding career, and a job well done – me and Jesse with our wonderful midwife Sonya Beutel (left)