

7th July 2009
Joanne Askham

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By 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.

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 am a well educated professional in the community and cannot understand how such legislation can be put forward by anyone educated in the full scope of birth in Australia. My first son was born in a hospital, under the care of obstetricians and my daughter was born at home under the care of two certified midwives and with backup from the Royal Woman's hospital. It makes me extremely sad that this choice cannot be offered to my daughter or any other well woman wishing a natural safe option.

I have attached a copy of my daughter's birth for your reading.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Askham

Temma's Entrance



It started with a smile. It was 6am and I had been awake for an hour. I had actually had a good nights sleep. The first contraction was like a little flame being set alight, that just warmed the bottom of my belly...

I lay there for a couple of hours contemplating what the day would bring, interrupted occasionally (every 5-10 min) with the re-ignition of, and the constantly warming flame. By 8am I really had to concentrate to blow through it, to blow the flame out.

When Michael woke up I told him it was happening, but he should probably go to work anyway, at least just for the morning. After he had gotten himself and Kian ready to go, I changed my mind and decided I would keep him at home to run errands for me. (Little did I know what a good decision that was)

Before Michael took Kian to creche I explained to Kian that the baby might be coming today and he was ecstatic. It has been a long wait for him.

My idea of what I wanted my early labour to be like was just to be me by myself, without feeling any pressure from any onlookers and maybe getting a few things finished around the house. It was of course where I intended to give birth.

After Michael left to take Kian to school, I hopped out of bed and started sorting out and cleaning the bedroom. The contractions seemed to stop for a while, well for about half an hour, and then they came back. By the time I was cleaning the bathroom they seemed to be coming every few minutes and I had to stop and concentrate and breath through them. (My Pot-belly stove was starting to cook)

Michael got back about the time I had almost finished cleaning upstairs and I decided it was time to chill out and start keeping track of these contractions. Over the course of the next hour, Michael really had a hard time. He was trying to organise stuff between 30-40 sec contractions that were a little over 2 minutes apart. I had no idea they were so concentrated, but still quite short. I tried to lie down and rest a while, but that was no good, so uncomfortable and extremely painful. I had to pretty much stay standing the whole time and leaning on the wall or sofa for support during the contractions. I needed Michael there for every one of them, which surprised me. I didn't want anyone touching me for Kian's labour.

Michael rubbed my lower back and relaxed my shoulders. During this hour I also 'chatted' with Charlotte, my sister in the US, but realised that after I had to put the phone down for a dozen contractions, that it might prove to be a very expensive phone call for her. I also tried to eat some toast, but I could not seem to finish a mouthful before the next fire was upon me. I found some comfort for my legs by sitting on the yoga ball and leaning against the back of the sofa, but the smell of the new sheepskin I had bought and was leaning on, soon turned my stomach and I threw up the banana I had just managed to get down.

After the hour we called Kristy-Rae, my student midwife to give her some time to organise her family before having to come over. We also rang Annie, my primary midwife. She was just about to go into a meeting, so she said she would call back. We thought it was still early.

In the hour to follow, things got more and more intense. By the time Annie rang back I was urgent to have here there. When Annie arrived I was kneeling on the floor over the sofa, sweating hot and unable to move from that spot. I sat back with each contraction and leaned against Michael. I started needing some counter pressure on my lower back and tail bone. Up until then I was , with much effort, dealing with the contractions by going 'inside myself' and pushing the pain down and away. It was no longer a little flame to blow out, but a huge fireball not wanting smothering.

I was having trouble. (Time for the Fireman). Annie asked me if I wanted to push, which made me actually evaluate what I was feeling and I was feeling a lot of pressure. In a very short space of time my waters broke with what sounded like a pop and felt like a crack and I was hobbled to the half filled, semi-cold pool. Oh what a relief. (What better way to control a fire than with water). I really went into my own world in the pool. I groaned through each contraction and involuntarily pushed every now and then.

During this time Aimee, Kristy-Rae & Cary, my second midwife arrived. They were all roped into helping fill and warm the pool while they took turns to rub my back and occasionally give me a drink.

The involuntarily pushes were coming more frequently and for much longer. I still did not feel comfortable pushing with them. I tried my hardest to breathe through them. Once Annie told me to relax my bum a little, that I would not rip apart and helped me try a few positions, I started helping it along. She (Temma) seemed happier with me squatting or kneeling leaning backwards.

Before I knew it she was crowning. As I put my hand between my legs, I could feel the softest flowing silky hair, and it was not mine. I imagined seaweed waving in the water. It was the best feeling and brought a big smile to my face. It gave me the incentive to go on and to help push her out to finally see her.

With a little bit of extra encouragement from Annie and a lot of yelling and groaning and yelling, this beautiful round head emerged. I could not stop touching that wonderful hair and then the small bumps of her face and those tiny ears. It seemed an eternity until my next contraction, but with another BIG push and Annie performing some fancy finger flip work, my gorgeous baby girl was born.

She came out of the water and into my arms and we looked at each other in awe.

She did not breathe straight away, but I felt her cord still pulsing and I held her low. There was no hurry. In her time she took her first breath.

Welcome to the world baby Temma Joyce.

Post Natal Notes:

After having such a wanted and wonderful birth experience at home I was amazed to realise that a home birth is not just about the birth. My recovery after birth was just priceless. I was so relaxed, comfortable and 'at-home'. Family and friends were invaluable (especially the ones that cleaned out the pool) and I had no-where to move, except where I wanted to go.

I also found out that the intense feeling on my tail bone when my waters broke, did some damage that needed some recovery.

After worrying so much and having a previous episiotomy I was happy that my perineum remained intact even after a biggish (9lbs 8) baby, and it gave me little discomfort post-natally.

The 'Fancy finger flipwork' Annie performed was to unravel the cord from around her neck and arm. She said Temma came out with a 'handbag and necklace'.

