

19th July 2009
Bronwyn Simpson

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.

On a more personal note: I am a mother of two children. My son was born in 2006, in a private hospital. It was a reasonable birth experience in itself but I felt that I was totally disempowered as soon as I walked through the hospital doors. I was very passionate about having a drug free birth, with interventions such as episiotomy being only used if absolutely necessary. I ended up with both an epidural (for the last 2.5 hours of my labour) and an episiotomy. Down there was a bit "messy" due to amniotic fluid and other "stuff", and due to having an epidural I felt like I was left to sit in my own mess. My blood pressure was low enough that I should have been unconscious, and I shivered regardless of the amount of blankets they piled on me. As he was crowning, the doctor said I should have an episiotomy, and I was not really in the head-space to be able to say no as by that time all I wanted was baby to be out. When I was pushing him out, the doctor and midwife wanted me to hold my legs up, to not make any noise, to hold my breath and push. All not conducive to a baby being delivered well, but unfortunately a method so commonly used! Finally I managed to voice that I wanted to put my legs down, and two pushes later my son was born. A little while after the elation of having my son wore off, the disappointment set in, that I had failed myself. Oh well, I said, at least I have a healthy baby!

I fell pregnant again, but due to how I felt about my first birth I had been doing a lot of research and speaking to a lot of people. Here might be a good place to say that I am a very well educated person. I have a PhD, where I used molecular biologic and electrophysiologic techniques to research a muscle disease. I have also worked for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons performing systematic reviews on new interventional procedures as well as reviews for the Medicare Services Advisory Committee (MSAC). Basically, what I am saying is I know how to scientifically evaluate the evidence. I concluded that having my next baby at home, with an independent midwife of my choosing was what I and my husband wanted to do both from an emotional and scientific point of view – i.e. birthing at home is as safe as birthing in a hospital (if not more so!). In February of this year, I birthed my daughter, into water in my own home. It was a truly amazing, life changing, empowering, uplifting and beautiful experience. My independent midwife was the most professional, caring and expert person at

what she does. Birthing at home with an independent midwife has many advantages, including but not limited to:

- Antenatal visits at my home – very useful as the thought of taking a two-year old to the obstetrician's office.....and she included him in the visits so he was familiar rather than fearful of the situation.
- Advice available at anytime – if I was concerned about something, I could send a simple text message, or make a phone call direct to my independent midwife rather than having to wait for a reply from an obstetrician or hospital.
- All decisions regarding my pregnancy and the birth of my daughter were EVIDENCE BASED, as my independent midwife took the time to keep up what was best-practice.
- My independent midwife came to me as soon as my labour started (actually I was still technically in pre-labour) and she monitored baby's heart rate and my labour progression from this time. This meant that I and the baby were being monitored much more closely as compared to my hospital birth, where I was only monitored in the last stages of labour after I had come to the hospital.
- The quietly capable presence of a skilled, knowledgeable person ie. my independent midwife, at the birth of my baby allowed me to relax, and really enjoy my labour and birth my baby beautifully and I fulfilled every wish that I had with regard to having babies.

In short:

Do not create a situation where it is illegal for an independent midwife to attend a birth at home.

Do not let Australia fall behind other first world countries with regard to birthing choices.

Do not force me to have any more children in the hospital system.

Do not take away my choice and my children's choice of where to birth our babies.

Do not wipe out the profession of independent midwifery as these women are truly the most amazing people that you would ever meet.

Yours sincerely
Bronwyn Simpson