

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.

The practices of homebirthing are safe and midwives currently in practice do so responsibly as do the labouring women. To deny women the right to choose how they give birth to their children is going back in time. My two experiences of homebirth have been a positive one for both me, my children, husband and midwives. I have included my birth stories here.

Yours sincerely
Kathrine Head

Birth Story: Emma

After 6 months of trying to conceive the day finally came when I had missed my period and did the test. I almost didn't believe that I actually was pregnant and had to do the test 3 times before I was convinced. The two stripes were definitely there and I was definitely pregnant. I couldn't wait to call Andrea and officially ask her if she would do the honours again as my midwife. Jason and I had briefly discussed the home birth option and he had agreed but I think with not much thought at that early stage.

As the weeks and months went by, "complications" started to arise. Firstly the Gestational Diabetes, but that was really no surprise, just the taking of insulin kind of threw me off a bit. Then there was a chance of a breech baby however the Doctor or Andrea didn't seem to be concerned about discussing the options and I was certainly already looking into whether there was a way I could still give birth naturally to a breech baby. Then the 36 week ultrasound came back with it documented in black and white that the cord was around the baby's neck. While I loved being pregnant I was a bit over the roller coaster of emotions associated with complications. It seems that the roller coaster ride was going to continue right up until the end!

On Wednesday night I started to have a few niggles which I had hoped might eventuate into something then but it seemed that Emma was going to make us wait. On Thursday I started to feel tired and wanted to rest and deep down inside thought that maybe it would happen then. I was often going on gut feelings but sometimes they can get a bit muddled up with what you actually would like to happen! I really wanted to listen and respond to my body this time.

Friday came and went. Andrea was heading down to Melbourne to the theatre. Andrea and I had convinced ourselves that it wasn't going to happen because she wasn't going to be around. Funnily enough when Andrea called in the morning to tell me that she was about to leave. No sooner had I got off the phone and gone to the toilet that I had had a show and quickly called Andrea to tell her. Now a true sign had arrived but it was going to be a slow process again. I didn't want Andrea to cancel her trip to Melbourne and I also didn't want her to be anxious while she was down there so I texted her a couple of times to keep her mind at ease and maybe

mine as well! Friday passed and Saturday arrived. Saturday soon passed and soon Sunday came with niggling all the way.

As it was Jason's birthday on Sunday I was hoping that I might be able to give him an extra special birthday present. James had given me the biggest cuddle that night and I just didn't want to let go. It was like he knew that our time together was going to change. It made me cry. Jason was being Mr Funny but I think that was to cover up his nervousness. It was nearly time for Emma to come into our lives but not just yet. As the contractions continued they were by no means the "real" contractions those hours before actual birth. Mental note to self "next time... real contractions are the one's with grunt and groan". Andrea came out Sunday night but nothing happened. We went to bed, they continued throughout the night.

Monday morning, at about 5.30am, Andrea was back here with Helen in toe. The contractions had a bit of pain to them but just weren't lasting long enough to kick in. I also felt like I was under a bit of pressure and maybe that's why nothing was happening. Andrea and Helen left around 11.00am and Jason and I were left with the thought of maybe we could bring things on naturally when James went down for his sleep. It was strange because in a way I wanted this to happen but I also wanted to wait and see how and when my body would allow me to give birth. In the end we had sex and no later than 2 hours had passed that the real grunt and groan contractions started. *We were finally on the way!*

The contractions were about 10 minutes apart and quickly jumped to 5 minutes. 5 minutes seemed to be Emma's magic number. From about 2.00am Monday morning the contractions were 5 minutes apart for a good 8 hours so when we reached this magic number again we thought.."here we go, 5 minutes again".

At around 4.00pm I called Andrea to tell her that I was still okay and that they were about 5 minutes apart. Things started to get a bit busy around the house about 30 minutes later with James banging pots and pans and Jason's phone ringing and all I wanted to do was go and hide in the bedroom. In a split second I was on the phone to Andrea and asked her to come out because it probably wouldn't hurt if she was here. No sooner had I got off the phone and made my way to my little safe haven that the contractions seemed to be coming a bit quicker as I walked around the bed

telling myself to hold on as I waited for Andrea. As soon as Andrea's car arrived I seemed to have relaxed and they seemed to be very regular and with pressure.

Andrea started to set things up and asked if she should run the bath. I told her that it wouldn't hurt and if I didn't like it I could always get out. Helen soon arrived and I think that's when it all began. Emma started to make her way down with the pressure in my bottom increasing each time. I then needed to go to the toilet but convinced Andrea (and maybe myself) that it was only a wee so it wasn't happening just yet. No sooner had I been to the toilet that I was in the bath with a huge sigh of relief from the water. I think very soon after my waters broke. What seemed like the next contraction, Emma's head was born and then the next a little bub was born. I remember through the contractions asking Andrea to help me as I thought she was leaving me but she wasn't going anywhere.

As I sat in the water in disbelief just hoping that everything was all right, Andrea called Jason and James in from outside to come and meet our new addition. At that stage we both didn't know the sex but we were able to find out together which was nice. I actually thought that Emma was a boy at first because all I saw was the cord and thought it might be a penis but then realised it was far too long and asked Jason what the sex was – A girl. James had the biggest smile on his face and Jason just had this look of amazement on his face. This time I was going to capture his expression in my memory bank.

At first I was very nervous holding Emma in my arms and my heart literally pounded. I wasn't too sure why. Whether it was the adrenalin rushing through me, the responsibility of a newborn or maybe the start of a Mother and Daughter relationship that I could mould any way I wanted too. I have started a journal for Emma to help me through this and one day will give it to her – maybe when she becomes a Mum. At first I wasn't sure whether I could bond with Emma but no sooner had I accepted my fears that the love started to come flooding in. I hope I can be the Mum to her that I always wished I had. I will certainly try my best and Emma and I will work it out together.

JAMES

Caught in a whirlwind of medical procedure and Mother Nature, in the end Mother Nature, teamed with trust, came out on top. This is my reflection of James' birth story.

Pregnancy was such a wonderful time for me. A woman who would usually get upset over little things and have a strong need to be in control and organised suddenly became a bit more relaxed and confident. An attitude of "go with the flow" came about much to Jason's amazement, however the urge to be an information gatherer still existed – I just wanted to do everything right and "to the book".

My initial fears of being a bad mother stemming from my own childhood concerned me however there was only two ways of looking at it – I could either be a bad mother or I could learn from the experience and do my best for my child to give it everything I didn't have – which option do you think is the better?

When I found out I was pregnant and it became public knowledge, Paula Murphy had recommended that I see Andrea to look after me during pregnancy. I loved the concept of having a private midwife but I also continued to see my Doctor. Why? I believed it was the right thing to do even though Andrea had pointed out the fact that 5 minutes in a doctors room cost \$50 a pop for a bit of a poke, weigh in and general health check. I guess I just wanted the best of both worlds by seeing a Doctor and Andrea. Had I only seen a doctor over the past 10 months I don't think I would've been as informed or prepared as what I was with Andrea. Let me rephrase that... I wouldn't have had the support.

As the months went on, unfortunately pregnancy took a second stand. Whilst I was excited about being pregnant and the end result, I didn't want to become absorbed in it as I know that when I get obsessed about something I really can go overboard. Work seemed to dominate my life and whilst I knew that I probably should've taken it a bit easier than I did, it was hard because I didn't want to disappoint my employer nor myself. As a result of the long hours and erratic diet, at around 28 weeks I was told that I had Gestational diabetes – I was devastated. I had been feeling so well throughout the pregnancy – I felt healthy. How could something go wrong? I knew it was time to slow down but I still don't think I really did until about week 34. I finished up work a week earlier.

I had enjoyed being pregnant. It seemed that I got off lightly with morning sickness, puffiness and all the other complaints you often hear from women. Why is it that people always tell you the negative things? Same goes with the whole labour/child birth experience. "Go the drugs"; "It is a pain you will never want to live through again"; "You don't know what you are getting yourself in for". The negatives always seem to outweigh the positives - Well I hope that I will be one of those women that can pass on a positive experience of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood.

Week 40 approached and I remember thinking that I didn't feel "prepared" for childbirth. In a way I was hoping that I could just skip the labour bit and have a child.

Was it because of the horror stories? I just kept thinking to myself “Trillions of women have done this so why cant I?” I also remember trying to convince myself that nothing could prepare me for child birth – maybe that was my excuse for being a bit slack in the research department or maybe it was denial as Andrea had once mentioned!?!?

Week 40 arrived however no baby. I wasn't disappointed as I knew that it would be soon, even if it would still take another 2 weeks. Life went on as normal that day with a couple of walks down to the back paddock and general chores around the house. That night things started to progress. I felt a very slight period type pain but didn't think too much of it. It didn't feel like anything I should be concerned about and it certainly wasn't the definite sign that Andrea said I would know when it came. At 5am on Wednesday morning I got a “show” – when I got out of bed later that morning I went to consult the books – it was time to start reading up!! On Wednesday I seemed a lot slower than previous days and really all I wanted to do was relax. That night, the period type pains started coming more regularly and out of curiosity I started to time them – at this stage it was about every 10 – 15 minutes. All I know is that I didn't get much rest that night. The pains continued into the morning then at 11am I started to leak. I called Andrea to let her know. Andrea came out at about 1pm for our weekly visit and we spoke about it. She advised me to get as much rest as possible because tiredness will win in the end if I didn't. It was now that I really wanted to know more about the “how's” rather than the “when's” but Andrea wouldn't give me any hints. Now I understand why. I really wanted to have clear in my head how the whole home to hospital thing was going to work. For the last time Andrea once again mentioned the home birthing option – she assured me that she wasn't going to trick me. I still had it clear in my head that it would go something like this. I would call Andrea when the contractions started to come more regularly. Andrea would come out to the house and sit with me until it was time to go. I didn't want to be at the hospital for very long and felt more comfortable at home until it was time to go. We would all then jump into the car then cruise into the hospital and maybe 1-2 hours later a baby would be born. This is how it really went....

By mid afternoon the contractions started coming every 6 minutes and lasted for about 40 – 60 seconds. By early evening, the contractions came every 4 – 5 minutes. I was still feeling okay and in control and didn't need Andrea at this stage. It didn't even really enter my head that the baby might be here soon and I was almost positive that it would probably be sometime the next day. At 9.00pm the pain from the contractions was too much now and I asked Jason to call Andrea as I couldn't do it by myself anymore. From this point on I had no concept of time. Andrea arrived and sat with me. Inside my mind I think I was hoping that by her being there that the pain might go away, but it didn't. It did make it more bearable though as I knew that Jason couldn't help me any longer. I remember trying to look at Andrea's stopwatch during contractions to know how long the contractions were – I honestly thought that they were only about 20 seconds apart – they were actually around the minute mark. All of a sudden things started to happen. Firstly I felt sick then I recall telling Andrea I needed to do a poo. Andrea sent me off to the toilet. She had a feel then got me to feel inside – I felt something hard and was a little “freaked out” because it was the head. I recall Andrea looking me straight in the eye and saying, “Kath, the baby is coming. We need to make a decision”. I looked up at Jason for him to make the call. I know that he played a major part in the decision to go to the hospital so I wanted it to be a decision that we made together. I cant even remember what Jason's response was but all of a sudden there was a flurry of

activity around me. I looked up and saw mats laid out on the floor and the oxygen tank. I didn't panic because I trusted Andrea and knew I was in good hands. Before I knew it I pushed a couple of times while on the toilet then Andrea told me to get onto all fours on the floor. I didn't think I would be able to get off the toilet but somehow I did. One more push and out James came. I remember sitting very still on the spa step and just taking it all in. James had to be attended too – I wasn't worried about myself and the blood that I saw on the floor. As long as James was okay. Andrea placed James in my arms and it was wonderful. I recall feeling shocked – it had happened. I had given birth and I had done it at home. WOW! I also needed to see Jason and remember just looking at him. Look what we had made.

From that point on till today as I write this reflection, natural instincts and mother nature have played a big part in the next transition in our lives. I always wanted to have things as natural as possible and not sure why I was so wrapped up in following medial procedure. I can't wait to be pregnant again and give birth to our second child now and it's only day 10 of Motherhood. I am enjoying it immensely and I only hope that I can pass on the positive experience to the next woman I come across that is pregnant.