

Monday, 13th July 2009

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.

My Personal Experience

I am a mother of three children aged 4 ½, 3 ½ and 2 year old. I am expecting my fourth child in January, 2010. I have had three very different birth experiences including my first child born via emergency caesarean, my second child born naturally at the hospital and my third child born at home. My homebirth was my only unproblematic birth. Without a doubt, this is due to the wonderful support and care that I received from my midwife and doula prior, during and after the birth; the environment in which I gave birth and the dramatic reduction in intervention during my labour.

I did not feel like a number, a "jersey cow" giving birth within the system and being spat out the other end. My feelings and inclinations as a mother were considered and respected. There was no pressure from insensitive and condescending doctors who are apart of the system, fearful of liability, place little importance on the relationship they build with an expecting mother, and seem unaware of how a mother and baby's birth experience effects both physical and mental recovery, and importantly, the bonding after the birth.

For this reason, my husband and I are planning a homebirth for my impending birth. In saying this, I do believe that the hospitals and doctors do have a place, providing assistance to those with special needs or to those who wish to deliver their babies within the hospital system. There are

wonderful, passionate hospital-based midwives in our area, who are committed to providing optimum care and birthing experiences for women, including pre and post-natal care. Unfortunately, the politics that evolve around the 'baby industry' limits their ability to provide this care that they know is essential for the well-being of the mother and baby.

The key here is that women MUST have choice from a range of birthing services in which to have their children. The success rates in homebirths are overwhelming. Very few women require drug intervention or experience complications requiring transfers to hospitals. Contrary to media reports, mother's that wish to birth at home do not wish to risk their, or their babies lives, and are aware that there are chances of having to transfer to hospital if complications arise. This is why it is vital that independent midwives and the expecting mother should have dialogue with the hospital staff so that everyone is included in the process, and are aware of the developments during the pregnancy.

The notion that babies should only be delivered at the hospital is backward thinking. Queensland, and Australia in a whole, is running well behind of their European and New Zealand counterparts in the maternity services available to women. This needs to change.

As a mother, as a woman, I refuse to be forced to conform to a system that I have very little faith or confidence in. This is not democracy or freedom of choice.

Independent midwives must be acknowledged as valuable and vital members of the maternity services in Queensland and Australia. They are providing safe, professional alternatives with overwhelmingly positive results.

Yours sincerely

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