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State, doctors 'force' midwives to quit

Some women are delivering their own babies at home because the Health Department has forced many qualified domiciliary midwives out of business, says the Home Birth Association.

Association spokesperson, Dr Deryn Cooper said the department's system of paying homebirth midwives meant most of them earned a maximum of about \$8000 a year.

Financial hardship and heavy opposition from the medical profession had forced six of the nine in Auckland to give up during the past year.

As the number of people wanting home births increased, many women were being forced to have their babies in hospital against their wishes, Dr Cooper said.

"What worries us most is that some women are so dedicated to a natural birth at home that they are having their babies at home without a midwife."

Some parents were using lay midwives who were not qualified and had no formal training.

The health department and a large section of the "medical hierarchy" seemed determined that the home birth movement should die and were largely to blame for the unsupervised births, she said.

"Women and their husbands are going to continue to have their babies at home and whether it's with effective domiciliary care or on their own is up to the Health Department."

The association was encouraging women to lobby the Health Department for an adequate number of midwives on salaries comparable to other sectors of the nursing profession.

The health department's assistant director of clinical services, Dr Dennis

Feeney, said he was not aware of any unsupervised home births.

"But if these people (the association) have this kind of information, they should let us know. It's a matter of great concern to us."

Dr Feeney said women who wanted a home birth should make sure they had adequate medical supervision.

"If they can't get a domiciliary midwife they have a duty to themselves and the baby to make sure they have access to a general practitioner or an obstetrician."

The department recognised the right of every woman to have her baby wherever she wished and was not trying to kill the home-birth movement.

Dr Feeney said he understood negotiations to increase domiciliary midwives' fees had been going on this year but to have gone by the board because of the price freeze.

● International Home Birth Week begins tomorrow and the association will mark it with a series of stalls in Auckland shopping centres.