



Focus on Saturday

Giving birth in your own home

IF you want to give birth rather than be delivered, then a group of Wellington women believe that they have an attractive alternative to a hospital delivery.

They are the Wellington Home Birth Association who offer advice and encouragement to women and families contemplating home birth and support the Wellington/Hutt Valley area's two midwives.

The midwives are paid per case by the Health Department. Midwife Jennifer Sage says:

"There is a gradual growth in the number of home births. The maximum the two midwives in this area can handle is six cases per month per midwife. At that, we hardly represent a threat to hospitals."

The association and midwives are definitely not trying to overtake the hospital birth process. They believe that the public are largely happy with Wellington birth facilities, but a small percentage of women would prefer a home birth and so are being offered that opportunity.

Home birth is no longer a necessity because of isolation or poverty and the gloomy picture of filth and terrible pain painted by movies and television is far from the truth.

The midwives do lay some conditions down when

By Julie Molloy



they take on a woman for a home birth, however. Women who smoke will not be taken on, according to Mrs Sage, because of the risk they run to the baby.

The woman must also have a doctor who is responsible for ante-natal care and is present at the birth.

The association offers ante-natal classes for both father and mother and regular visits by the midwife are increased to once a day for 14 days after the birth.

The main argument against home birth is, of course, the danger to mother and baby brought about by the absence of hospital emergency services.

However the association is quick to defend the home-birth process.

A doctor is always present at the birth and the midwife brings in the necessary medical supplies. A full range of back-up gear is there, including oxygen and suction for the baby. The

birth always takes place near a base hospital in case of an emergency.

The mother is closely monitored during pregnancy and birth for any abnormalities — if they occur, she is taken straight to hospital.

Mrs Sage believes that one of the biggest advantages is that the birth takes place in the mother's own home and so is conducted as she wants it to be, rather than just accepting hospital ways.

The midwives believe that without the bright lights, noise and conflicting opinions offered in the hospital, the mother and baby get a better start.

The aim of a home birth is for it to be drug-free and the baby comes at its own pace without being hurried along. The mother and baby are not separated at any time and the association emphasises the importance of keeping the family unit intact and the husband involved.

The father is not sent home after the birth and the family is not restricted to visiting hours. The father knows what is going on during the birth and can help his wife throughout.

The Home Birth Association boasts a 100 percent success rate at breast feeding.

"The mother feels that she has done it herself

without someone else taking over," according to association member Jessica McLean.

Medical opinions on the safety of home births differ. Doctors who do them like them, but others feel it puts too much responsibility on them, according to association chairwoman Mrs Anne Turner.

"Many doctors do not have faith in a healthy body giving healthy birth," she says.

"Doctors are educated in the abnormalities which can happen, so much emphasis is put on the problems. Once you interfere with the process, it is unbalanced and some doctors feel it should be further interfered with."

Wellington/Hutt Valley midwives Jennifer Sage and Lyn McLean have three years nursing training, special midwifery training and extensive experience in hospital maternity wards behind them.

Mrs Sage regards her job as a pleasure and by keeping in contact with the family, sees the baby which has been born at home growing up.

She believes that the disadvantages are in the eye of the beholder.

"If they see any disadvantages in a home birth and don't want one, then they don't have one," she says.

The Wellington Home Birth Association contends that home birth offers a natural drug-free birth in the comfortable surroundings of your own home and the support of the father and involvement of the rest of the family.

It offers the help and advice of a midwife you have come to know during pregnancy, ante-natal classes for both parents and home help after the birth, if necessary.

The service is free and no special equipment need be bought by the parents.

Medical opinions on home birth differ from doctor to doctor — from those who will perform home births, to those who won't.

The association offers an alternative service which is entirely the choice of the mother and family.

Further information is available from midwives Jennifer Sage (Hutt Valley), 663-891, or Lyn McLean (Wellington), 873-801.