

# Malcolm hits home births

THE TRENDY advocacy for home births in New Zealand should be discouraged, the Minister of Health, Mr Malcolm, said yesterday.

Mr Malcolm told the Asia-Oceania congress of perinatology: "I hope it will not take tragedies to convince the community that hospital deliveries are the safest and most effective method of caring for both the mother and child."

No delivery should be made without two professionally qualified people present — one for the baby and one for the mother . . . "But the fragility and vulnerability of the newborn must be the major concern."

Mr Malcolm's statements drew sharp reaction from home birth advocates last night.

Dr Carol Shand, who performs home deliveries, said Mr Malcolm did not know what he was talking about.

"I might be interested to hear what Mr Malcolm has to say on the politics of health, but what right has the Minister of Health got to lecture us on the sort of clinical care we give? For anyone to take seriously what Mr Malcolm has to say about anything to do with clinical care, well I just laugh at him."

New Zealand Home Birth Association secretary Henriette Kemp said Mr Malcolm's statements had no evidence to support them.

Most home births in New Zealand were attended by a doctor and a registered domiciliary midwife, though in some cases the doctor might opt not to be present at the birth.

But the midwife would contact the doctor to report how labour was proceeding, and the doctor could then decide whether to attend.

Most home births took place within half an hour from a hospital, where mother and baby could get specialist treatment if it was needed.

In cases where babies had to be put on to special life support facilities, it usually took the hospital half an hour to prepare those facilities anyway. And in the meantime, the midwife could administer first aid.

Mrs Kemp said there was a minutely increased risk of babies dying with home births if they were born outside the half hour limit.

But in terms of health and the best possible start in life, home births were far preferable to hospital deliveries.

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