

Home births worry Minister

Auckland
The "trendy advocacy" for home confinements in New Zealand should be discouraged, the Minister of Health, Mr Malcolm, said yesterday.

Mr Malcolm told the Asia-Oceania congress of Perinatology, that he could not get enthusiastic about the trend.

"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," he said.

In Britain a big drop in home births in the past 20 years had coincided with a

marked drop in infant and maternal mortality.

Giving birth was not just a big event for the parents but also for the baby itself.

"He hasn't got any say about where his birth will take place but he does have rights" Mr Malcolm said, "And one of them is for adequate care at birth and thereafter."

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."

The secretary of the New Zealand Home Birth Association, Henriette Kemp, said Mr Malcolm's statement had no supportive evidence.

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

The midwife would contact the doctor to report on the labour, and the doctor could then decide whether to attend.

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

It usually took hospital staff half an hour to prepare life-support services, and in the meantime, the midwife could administer first aid.