

Home birth

SIR, In view of the recent publicity given underwater births the New Zealand Home Birth Association Inc wishes to clarify some points.

First, place of birth falls into roughly three categories — hospital, which is usually planned, out of hospital, which occurs at an unusual venue, eg taxi, ambulance, and home, which is usually planned and occurs at the home of the mother and baby.

Standards accepted by members of the NZHBA mean that responsible homebirths are planned and well prepared. The mother receives ante-natal care from her own doctor and is usually attended by a domiciliary midwife or the doctor who cared for her ante-natally. The mother is well prepared

and informed. Likewise, family and friends present at the birth are also well prepared and fulfil a supportive role.

Underwater births are a new phenomenon in New Zealand. The NZHBA has no official policy on underwater births but is concerned to see that they are carried out in a responsible manner. At present it appears that underwater births fall into the "out of hospital" category. Although they have been planned as "underwater" births it seems that the people involved have not been as well prepared or informed as would be expected if the birth had been a planned homebirth.

Finally, I am unable to find any evidence of land-based mammals giving birth in water.

Marilyn Walker, national spokesman, NZHBA.

Best said and ranged from the standard 6.5 per private hospital workforce.

Midwives call for doubled benefits

DOMICILIARY midwives are pushing for a doubling of the Government benefit they get for supervising home births.

The midwives are now paid \$167 a birth, which Wellington's only home midwife Jenny Johnston described yesterday as appalling. She said the benefit was not only for the birth and labour, but three antenatal and 12 post-natal visits as well.

The main effect of the low benefit rate was that women were being denied the right to have their babies at home because midwives were reluctant to go into the domiciliary service.

"I know midwives that are really interested in doing it, but for the low pay," Ms Johnston said.

She said there were about 20 domiciliary midwives in New Zealand, and increasing the benefit to an adequate level would only cost an extra \$100,000.

Ms Johnston said the previous government raised the allowance 17 per cent last year, but former Health Minister Aussie Malcolm seemed not in favour of home births.

However, Labour Party policy was to expand the domiciliary midwife service, and the first step toward this would be an increased benefit.

their investment shares wound up at a winding-up auctioneer's as some shareholders had opted to forfeit the licence was year, after extensive negotiations.

Home birth demand too much for midwife

DEMAND for home births in Wellington means some people may miss out, according to the Wellington Home Birth Association.

Spokesman Madeleine Gooda said yesterday there was too much work for the one midwife who supervised home births.

Already May was booked up, and the number of deliveries might have to be limited.

She said another domiciliary midwife was needed. But there were few applications because of low wages.

Domiciliary midwife Jenny Johnston said midwives who de-

livered babies at home got about half the pay of those who worked in hospitals.

They were paid by the Health Department according to the number of visits they made, under a contract drawn up in the 1930s.

Ms Johnson said she knew of midwives who were interested in getting into home births, but were put off because of the pay.

Her main concern was making sure there was a choice available between home and hospital births.

A better rate of pay would help, she said.

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