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27 July 1979

Mrs Miriam Dell
Chairwoman
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Dear Mrs Dell,

Thank you for your letter of 19 July 1979 reminding me that I had not replied on behalf of the Working Party for Children in Separation to your request for comments on recommendation 14/90 of the Report of the Conference on Women and Health. I did not do so as the Working Party has been in recess for two years and no one replaced me as secretary.

I am enclosing a copy of the letter sent by the Working Party to members of the Wellington Hospital Board in March 1977 proposed closure of St Helens Hospital. I cannot furnish a copy of the article which was enclosed as I lent the book from which it was taken and the borrower lost it. The same material, however, is included in the first chapter of Klaus and Kennell's "Maternal- infant Bonding" which I could let you have if you wished.

Any further comments which I write here are my own and not necessarily the views of the Working Party.

11 AUG 1979

I believe that information about bonding has become quite widely distributed among health workers, particularly nurses and midwives, in recent times. Nevertheless, practices followed often suggest incomplete understanding or acceptance of the underlying principles. It has been difficult for most professionals to relax or abandon the routines which have dominated their practice for many years, to permit enough flexibility and avoid interference, particularly in relation to the birth process and to breast feeding. The consumer as a partner in decision making, whose wishes are granted whenever possible, is a concept which has been slow in gaining ground. Also the practice (only gradually being superseded) of staffing hospitals mainly with constantly changing student nurses or midwives instead of qualified practitioners makes it difficult to achieve stability and consistency of approach in personnel, conditions which contribute to a relaxed atmosphere.

The planned closure of the Wellington St Helens Hospital and transfer of patients to a central base hospital is not an isolated situation. It is an example of a

trend in policy and practice. All over the country maternity hospitals (usually small and rural) have been or are being closed.* This is making family centred maternity care more difficult to provide through removing the mother geographically from her sources of social support, making it more difficult for her husband to be with her and for her to be relaxed and confident during labour and the birth. The availability of highly trained medical personnel and sophisticated equipment in base hospitals leads to more frequent intervention during labour and birth and renders contact between husband and wife, parents and infant more difficult to achieve, both physically and emotionally. Staffing problems and costs are held responsible for the closing of hospitals, but a campaign to save these and to recruit staff would be in the interests of "normal" patients and the promotion of bonding.

Those who desire home births still find it difficult to obtain the services of doctors and midwives, even in situations where risk of complications is minimal.

Early discharge from hospital with supervision from hospital district nursing services is a practice which is growing, having developed further in some districts than in others. This arrangement can be beneficial in promoting bonding, but is most likely to be successful if the birth experience in hospital was satisfactory and if there is domestic assistance of some kind to relieve the mother of responsibility and anxiety.

The granting of paternity leave is a positive step in making fathers available to participate in the birth experience, to be generally supportive to their wives and to share the early care of the infant and the adjustment of the family to the new member.

As an alternative to home births which are unlikely ever to find favour with the majority of the medical profession, some parents are urging authorities to set up alternative birth centres. See enclosed: (A) clipping from Evening Post of July 21 1979, (b) Mrs Diony Young's address to the Christchurch Parents Center, and (c) article from Nursing Outlook of December 1978, "The Childbearing Center: an Alternative to Conventional Care."

To summarize my views relating to bonding:

Information about the significance of bonding has become quite widely disseminated but practices in many hospitals still suggest that principles behind it are not always fully understood or accepted.

Bonding could be better facilitated in hospital by:

- greater flexibility of hospital routines
- more choice for parents and involvement in decision making
- stable staff of qualified nurses and midwives and consistency of approach
- avoidance of unnecessary technical intervention in natural processes

Small local hospitals are more conducive to family centred maternity care than large institutions with specialist personnel and sophisticated technology. The retention of local hospitals for "normal" births would

* See reference to consolidation, p.3 of notes on Mrs Diony Young's address

favour bonding through a relaxed atmosphere and full family involvement

Early discharge from hospital and follow up care by district nursing services is favourable to bonding if adequate support is available in the home

Paternity leave facilitates parental bonding through father^h involvement and support for the mother

The provision of alternative birth centres would provide many parents with an acceptable substitute for home births, offering them a variety of choices in the conduct of a normal birth

The matter of choice in relation to the type of maternity care available is very important to parents who are well informed and those who care about bonding. At present medical technology seems to be a stronger force than concern for human relationships. Possibly a nationwide movement is needed to clarify the wishes of parents and needs of families and to make a concerted approach to the providers of services to ensure that consumer attitudes are made known and as far as possible accepted as a basis for planning services.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Fieldhouse

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