

National midwives' college formed

Women's health in the south has probably had the biggest boost to both its recognition and its solution with the development of a Southland region within the newly formed New Zealand College of Midwives says local president Margaret McDonald.

Mrs McDonald, manager of patient services at the Winton maternity hospital, says the inclusion of lay women, individually and as representatives of interested organizations, adds a great deal to the composition of the college.

Although the College was formed as a replacement for the less than effective midwives interest group within the New Zealand Nurses Association it has a different impact on the community because included in its aims is the wish to help all women in areas of health, to concern themselves with wellness right through the lives of women.

Mrs McDonald says that still the greatest hurdle to be overcome is the public perception of midwives which varies from "a nurse" to "not a nurse" to "like my mother being there when I have my baby."

Endearing though the last is, it equals the others

in being less than accurate.

Midwives are trained nurses who have undergone additional, post graduate training to enable them to practice midwifery, the giving of care and advice to women during pregnancy and labour, the safe delivery in normal circumstances and the aftercare which follows.

Midwives work, as does Mrs McDonald, in hospitals, or may work in home environments; they may work with doctors or independently of them and they have the specialist responsibility throughout their professional lives of caring for the health of women, a charge which includes certain areas of gynaecology as well as obstetrics, and may involve family planning, health education and child care.

When the Southland region of the college held its inaugural meeting last month, the committee was drawn from mid-



Mrs Margaret McDonald, chairman of the Southland region of the New Zealand College of Midwives.

wives in practice here and representatives of the Southland Women's Resource Centre, Plunket, Parents Centre, La Leche League and Patients Rights; and with College representation on the National Council of Women the affiliation links are firmly established.

The threat of single registration within the

nursing profession has concerned midwives more perhaps than any other single group of nurses. The decision to form their own college rather than to remain an interest group under the national umbrella stemmed in part from this.

What Margaret McDonald wants now is for Southland women to see the local region as existing for them, to help meet their needs in terms of maternal and general women's health care.

She says the consumers of any service have the right to input and nowhere is that to be more clearly demonstrated than within their own area.

With the invitation to members of the general public and to other health related professionals to become associate or affiliate members of the College, the chance is there for direct input by consumers and a closer liaison between midwives and their clients. This way too women have a direct influence on the development of the profession and can influence the care and services brought to women in both child-bearing and general areas of women's health.

Midwives are prepared to take up the cudgels on behalf of women's health in this region and elsewhere through College links says Mrs McDonald.

To this end members of the public are invited to their next meeting, on May 17 at the ante natal

lecture theatre, Kew. The guest speaker will be John Braithwaite, manager of the community support committees for the Health Development Unit.

There has been interest in the formation of a women's services unit and already women are covering some of the ground when, like Mrs McDonald, they are appointed to local community committees.

She sees her selection as a member of the Winton community health committee a chance to bring to the table matters of direct interest to women and their families. Doubtless this is, she says, being echoed in other community committees formed.