

Maternity care message pushed

By BARRY HAWKINS
Upper Hutt reporter

Doctors throughout the Wellington region are being urged to inform women of their legal right to free maternity care for 14 days after the birth of their babies.

The move has come from a group of Hutt Valley doctors who are "gravely concerned" about the dangers to mothers and babies from the increase in unplanned early discharges with the cuts to maternity services.

They want all doctors involved in maternity care to give a leaflet to mothers-to-be advising them of their legal right to post-natal care. The group pledges support for their patients in exercising that right. The leaflet also warns women, for their own and their babies' safety, not to agree to leave hospital until they have consulted their own doctors. Group spokesman Dr Marko Kljaković said today that while Hutt Valley doctors were faced directly with the repercussions of the closure of Elderslea maternity hospital, slashed maternity services affected the whole region.

"We cannot say that every doctor who delivers will support this necessarily but we have had a very broad base of support from those who have been contacted," he said.

Dr Kljaković emphasised that the decision on the appropriate time for a mother to leave hospital lay with her and her doctor. But nursing staff were being placed in the intolerable situa-

MOTHER AND NEW BORN BABY FOR YOUR SAFETY

1. **DO NOT AGREE TO LEAVE HOSPITAL** until you have consulted your medical practitioner. Your medical practitioner has an obligation to ensure that you are well enough to leave hospital.

2. **YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS** to free maternity care continue for 14 days after the birth of your baby.

Comprehensive post natal care is the responsibility of your Area Health Board. Central Government has stated this in law.—

A copy of the leaflet advising women of their maternity care rights.

tion of having to pressure women to go home because their beds were needed.

"If nursing staff take it on themselves to make what is a medical decision then they will have to take the repercussions if anything goes wrong," he said.

Dr Kljaković said the board did not have the back-up services to support its policy of promoting early discharges.

"A huge increase in domiciliary midwives and back-up support will be needed. The cost of that is going to be far in excess of what is saved by the cuts," he said.

The doctors were critical of

the two-bed birthing unit proposed for Elderslea to replace the present 10-bed ward.

Women would be expected to return home within six to eight hours of delivery, he said. It was estimated that only about 60 of the 400 women who had their babies at Elderslea each year would "vaguely approach" the criteria for delivery in the birthing unit.

"Sixty deliveries would not be viable and we predict the unit would be closed within six months," Dr Kljaković said.

This would mean that Hutt Hospital's hard-pressed maternity hospital would face the impos-

sible job of coping with all deliveries from the Upper Valley, he said.

In distributing the leaflets, the doctors were not advocating non-co-operation with the board.

"It is not a move to boycott, or disrupt or be radical," he said. "Our concern is to see that our patients get the standard of medical care to which they are legally entitled." They did not blame the board for what was happening. "You can juggle the finances every way you like but the end result is that services will be cut as a direct result of the Government's policy of decreased spending on health.