

The New Zealand Home Birth Association

Wellington Branch
Box 11-412
Wellington

SUMMARY OF REGIONAL CONFERENCE (Middle NZ)
Held on 29/9/83 in Wellington.

Branches attending: Wellington, Manawatu, Nelson, Christchurch.

About 20 people attended. From out of Wellington: Lois from Manawatu, Dom. Midwives Bronwen Pelvin and Chris Voaden from Nelson, and Denise Arps (Nat. Sec) and Alison Jones from Christchurch. We missed delegates from the Nelson HBA. Appreciated the time and effort Alison and Denise put into coming all the way from Christchurch. Pleased to meet Lois, who had only just started getting involved in the Manawatu branch.

Format.

Seating was in a large circle. Pauline O'Sullivan from Wgtn. got the ball rolling by getting us to introduce ourselves and then indicate what we wanted to discuss at this conference. We made a list of the following topics:

Nurses' Amendment Bill, Hospital Board control of Dom Midwives, Pay for Dom Midwives (Private, state, other options.), Midwifery Training, Lay midwifery, running a branch and avoiding 'burn-out', getting our message to the pre-birth population, using other organisations and bodies, the constitution, and the National Body.

Pauline also went over some general rules to facilitate discussion, and got everyone present to agree to these.

We decided to plan the day as follows: after the aforesaid, afternoon tea; then a plenary session discussing the first 5 topics followed by lunch; then divide into two groups who had a choice to discuss either topics 6, or topics 7 and 8; then afternoon tea, followed by another plenary session on the constitution and the national body.

The following is a summary of what was discussed at the conference:

1/

Nurses' Amendment Bill.

Henriette outlined the main points of concern. Branches reported the following action on the Bill: Wellington: wrote national submission, sent these out to other branches, National Federation of Parent Centres, NZ Committee for Children, YWCA, Advisory Committee on Women's Affairs, Labour Party Caucus Committee on Women's Issues, National Council of Women, Ruth Richardson and Marilyn Waring, Business and Professional Women's Club, asking them

to make their own submissions on our behalf. Henriette made a press statement and spoke on the radio about the Bill. Nelson branch has written a submission. Nelson midwives, wrote a submission and Bronwen will appear before the committee. Manawatu have sent in a submission. Christchurch have used the Bill as the main focus for their publicity week, and had a successful public meeting to discuss the Bill with Anne Hercus and Dr. Dalley as speakers. Two Wellington members (Henriette and Pam Skelton, hospital midwife), will also present oral submission to the select committee on behalf of the National HBA. As many Wgtn members as possible will go along to be present at the hearings. Wgtn. Parent Centre and the National Federation of Parent Centres have written submissions. Ruth Richardson has replied saying that 'You appeal to help but primarily this is the province of the Select Committee. However, I shall be posing questions on your behalf prior to deliberation.' Wellington branch reported that Marilyn Waring, during a recent meeting with us, stressed the importance of getting as many individuals from other organisations to give verbal submissions during the hearing, and for branches to actively lobby their regional MPs to speak out on the Bill during its second hearing. Marilyn also suggested that more fathers should write letters to their MPs, who, largely being male, would be more inclined to listen to the father.

2. Hospital Board Control of Domiciliary Midwives.

Christchurch reported on a meeting they had with their hospital superintendent who stated he was not in favour of the shift to hospital board control and was not in favour of Area Health Boards. If this shift occurred, they feel pretty sure to lose one of their midwives who is not 'in favour' with hospital staff.

Nelson midwives expressed they feared loss of autonomy but saw there would be advantages of access to equipment, resources, etc, and they would be able to automatically accompany their patients when transferred.

Manawatu stated they had an excellent rapport with their hospital board and staff, mainly due to Lynley McFarlane's tact and charm, but that there is no guarantee that this will continue.

It was pointed out that Area Health Boards were bound to become a reality and that these would be different because of a wider range of health care, being more community-oriented and responsible for a larger area. Hospital boards had a different attitude concerned mainly with hospitals.

It was suggested that a cost-analysis study be undertaken, possibly by a Health Department economist, to set out the financial saving of home births. Several Wgtn people agreed to act on this.

Henriette made the point that if Dom Midwives are employed by the Hospital Boards, then the NZNA would be able to lobby effectively on their behalf for better pay. The meeting felt, however, that if possible the midwives should continue to be paid on a contract, self-employed basis. The Dom Midwives should put their energy into developing their own power rather than pushing for the NZNA to pursue their pay claims.

The following guidelines were formulated should dom. midwives come under the control of hospital boards.

1. Dom Midwives are to be recognised as independent practitioners of their profession and do not come under the supervision of obstetricians or hospital midwives.
2. That there should be no criteria for eligibility. A mother has to be considered eligible by the dom midwife and GP concerned.
3. Professional equipment and a vehicle should be supplied to the dom midwife, with the added necessity of retaining the vehicle at night.
4. Salary- equivalent to hospital midwives with recognition of the 24-hour call-out factor, and the extra responsibility.
5. That the contract basis of employment be continued. That the DMS and HBA together formulate and push for a suitable contract under which dom midwives could operate.

It would be advantageous for all branches to arrange meetings with their hospital boards to put these points to them.

3. Pay for Dom Midwives.

After considerable discussion of the 'State versus Private', the meeting generally concluded that we should continue to push for full state support of dom midwives. The point was made, however, that the truth of the matter may be that under the present Government, this will never happen. Alternatives are therefore that Dom midwives charge private fees and forego their benefit; that we press for a change in legislation so that dom midwives can charge privately and claim the benefit; or that parents pay the full charge to the midwife and then claim the benefit (this is currently not possible); or that we find devious ways of paying a midwife, such as through a trust, or the HBA 'employing' her as a consultant or childbirth educator. A number of branches are presently looking into the latter alternative.

Finally, is there a need to have a unified 'policy' as an association on this issue, or should we just let branches get on with their own ideas?

Can we continue to press for complete state support and at the same time use other ways of paying domiciliary midwives? These questions were not resolved.

4. Midwifery Training .

Some people, expressed that they felt the present training was satisfactory, but that allowance should be made for practise of dom midwifery under supervision, or in the care of an experienced dom. midwife. Others felt dissatisfied with the present training, it being largely irrelevant to natural childbirth.

It was agreed that the HBA had a major role to fulfill in

in fully educating parents, doctors, nurses, etc. in the advantages of home birth. Already, various branches were doing much to help educate student doctors and nurses by speaking to them at medical schools and technical institutes. Someone pointed out we should all invite a doctor or nurse (student or practising) to attend our home births.

5. Lay Midwifery.

As more and more areas find they are short of dom midwives, they will tend to feel they want to use the services of lay midwives. Northland and Waiheke Island are presently in this position. The DMS has asked the HBA to write to the Waiheke support group to ask them to disassociate themselves from the HBA, since the HBA agreed last year not to support lay midwives. Henriette pointed out that this was not an easy thing to do. The meeting was adamant however that we should not be seen to support lay midwives, even if it means losing members. The point was made that Waiheke home birthers could still belong to the HBA if they so wished.

6. Getting our message across to pre-birth population.

Suggestions:

- get Home Birth Association listed in your phone book, and have 'see Citizens Advice Bureau' or similar next to it to obtain up-to-date phone number.
- National pamphlet. Press to be put in doctors' rooms. Or, instead of a pamphlet, a small poster with contact phone number to put on notice boards in doctors' rooms.
- _ This pamphlet or poster might be able to be funded by a grant.
- _ Write a national information booklet on facts and figures of home birth. Someone is contacting the Labour Dept. about getting a PEP person to work on this. Could be funded by a grant. Henriette to plan outline for discussion at next conference.
- _ Talking to schools. Liberal studies programmes for seventh formers.
- _ Talking to medical students.
- _ Get books into your local library.

7. Using other organisations and bodies.

Margaret Gillanders and Denise Arps are preparing a summary of this for the national newsletter.

8. The constitution.

Henriette raised some items in the Constitution which had not been working well or at all.

1. In the constitution it states that the AGM shall be held no later than April, but the meeting has always been held in May. Agreed by the regional conference that the constitution be amended on this point.

2. Annual Financial Statement.

The constitution states that a statement should go out to all members along with the notice of the AGM. Members have never been sent individual notices of the AGM, this being announced by branch newsletter and they have not seen a balance sheet at all. The regional conference agreed that it was not necessary to amend the constitution here, that notification by branch newsletter was sufficient. In future however, a national balance sheet should go into branch newsletters as well.

3. Chairmanship of AGM

The constitution states that the chair at the AGM should be taken by the president of the Association. The meeting felt that this job should be able to be delegated by the president if she so wishes. The constitution should be amended to say it is the responsibility of the president to ensure the AGM is chaired and that she can delegate the job to another member or members.

4. Membership list.

The constitution requires that a register be held for all the members by the national secretary. This has not been done in the past. The meeting agreed that this rule should be adhered to, and that the national secretary would be responsible a list of members was sent to her from each branch at a certain time.

9. National Body .

The following topics were brought up for discussion:

1. Do we want a national body?
2. What functions do we want the national body to perform?
3. What do we call this body and its officers?
4. How do we fund this national body?
5. How do we vote at the AGM?
6. Should office-holders be rotated around branches, or should they be elected on merit and be able to come from various branches?
7. Should any one person be able to hold an office for more than one year?

Unfortunately we only managed to discuss questions 1,2, and 5 as we ran out of time.

1. There was unanimous agreement that there should be some form of national body.

2. Auckland's suggestion of abolishing the office of national spokesperson or president and having only a Lobbying/resource co-ordinator in Wellington was discussed. It was pointed out by Henriette that this job was created last year not to actually do the lobbying but to help other branches do their own lobbying by advising them on what to do and giving them the necessary information. The meeting felt that there was definitely a need for a national spokesperson or president, if only to give the Association credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the establishment and the political machine. The meeting did not agree with Auckland that a national spokesperson would interfere with individual branches being able to act of their own initiative and speak out on behalf of their own branches.

One person pointed out that she felt that various jobs or offices could be shared amongst a number of people. That it was too much

work and responsibility to give one person one office. She gave the example of Wellington's committee and how it worked. (See Wtn. Branch Newsletter, no. 17, April 1983). Someone suggested regional co-ordinators, but the meeting didn't favour this.

Denise pointed out that she had had very little correspondence to do so far this year. She feels unconfident about her function and that she would have preferred to have the president in the same city or region as she .

The meeting came up with the following list of functions:

1. Speaking to the media, other organisations, Government, on behalf of the national Association.
2. Communication within the HBA
3. Collecting, distributing, co-ordinating resource material.
4. Treasury. Keeping a cheque book. Paying out national expenses. Collecting levy. Applying for grants.
5. Correspondence between the HBA and outside, and within the HBA.
6. Be representative of the whole country. i.e. members should be informed on everything that has happened and that is happening around the country.
7. Lobby Government, write national submissions , etc..
8. Represent NZHBA at overseas meetings and conferences or other seminars, conferences, etc, in NZ.
9. Outline national policy. Clarify and co-ordinate national policy.

How the national body should function.

It was discussed how at present, the national body consists of the elected officers plus the secretaries of each branch.

It was felt that the national body meets really only at the AGM, and otherwise confers by correspondence, and that the secretaries were not necessarily the delegates to conference and the AGM. The meeting felt that really there was no need for membership of the national body other than the elected officers who were responsible for the functions outlined above. All decisions made by these officers could be discussed and agreed to either at conference/AGM, or by correspondence with individual branches. during the year.

How do we vote at the AGM?

Because the membership of individual branches varies considerably, it was voted on and passed at the Dunedin conference in 1982 that voting should be proportional, on a basis of one vote for 100 members, (branches with less than 100 members having one vote, with 100-200 members, 2 votes, etc.).

Dunedin's views, expressed in a remit put forward to the last AGM, were discussed. They feel that there should be one branch, one vote, because it is the particular nature of home birth in

different parts of NZ that matters most and must be reflected in national policy. We discussed various ways in which we could resolve this conflict between trying to have a fair representation of individual members along with a truly national perspective. No agreement was reached on how to resolve this problem.

SUMMARY

Going by the comments made during and at the end of the conference, most people enjoyed the contact and discussion. Clear-cut ideas were reached on some issues, no solutions for others. Most of us felt that discussion and communication was good and that this was largely due to the small size of the group. Some of the techniques used by the two people who shared the job of facilitating worked very well- e.g. when the facilitator became aware during a particular part of the discussion that a small number were saying the most, she used the technique of going around the circle to ask every person's point of view.

MORE ON THE CONSTITUTION.

The 'middle NZ' regional conference has made some agreement on matters concerning the constitution, as described above. Several points still have to be decided on, however. These include the questions of 1. The names of office holders (President, Co-ordinator, Spokesperson?);

2. Whether or not an office holder can hold that office for more than one year. (The constitution does not allow this, unless there is no one available to take on the office).

3. Whether the various office holders should come from one branch. (At present the constitution requires that they do).

There may be more questions which your branch or any individual member would like to see discussed and which could lead to a change in the constitution. Unfortunately, a letter written by Bridget Allen and myself which we sent to Auckland to be put into the first national newsletter asking branches to consider the constitution and send their ideas into us, has been mislaid. We are now running fairly short of time. Bridget and I would like to be able to draft a new constitution based on a consensus of your ideas ready for presentation and voting at the next AGM. We therefore ask you to carefully read and discuss the constitution and send us your ideas as soon as possible please, and fill in the accompanying questionnaire. Thank you.

Bridget Allen and Henriette Kemp. (Wgtn.)

(PS: I have a new address and phone number:

26A Fitzroy St.,
Wadestown.
Wellington.

Ph. 730 560.)

