

# The New Zealand Home Birth Association

Wellington Branch  
Box 11-412  
Wellington

Secretary,  
Auckland HBA

28 July, 1982.

Dear Barbara,

Thank you for your last two letters. I am really appreciating this contact from you.

You asked if we had any material we would like to see included in your booklet. You will probably already have thought of the following: birth stories; a general picture of a "typical" hospital birth, if there is such a thing; overseas organisations and publications; some statistics, including overseas ones; some of the findings of Dave West about the type of people who choose home births; some blurb about the 'Risk' factor; mortality; the politics of home birth; suggested reading; famous birth philosophers (R.D. Laing, Kitzinger, Leboyer, Helen Brew, Ina May Gaskin); birth trends overseas; a brief description of the NZHBA, its beliefs and aims, etc.; some findings about birth made recently, especially effects of interference, drugs, etc.; the reasons we choose a home birth; why is a midwife better than a doctor or hospital midwife as a birth attendant; some nice quotes from parents, children, midwives, doctors who have attended a home birth. I could go on but this is beginning to sound like a book. Anyway, good luck. We are looking forward to the finished product and feel it will be eminently useful.

About my comment in the letter I sent to branches, about not using personal opinions and local experience for press releases. I guess I meant... that people should avoid using local experience and personal opinion to describe the home birth movement in general and thus give an incorrect picture of what is going on all over NZ.. Sure, personal experiences and local events on the home birth scene are very worth publishing, and I didn't mean to discourage these. But when people are describing home birth in more general terms; trends, beliefs, figures, etc., I feel it is best to describe what is happening on a national scale. There is some danger of the local scene colouring what is happening nationally.

I am pleased you made this comment and see how it could be interpreted this way. I shall clarify things to other branches as well.

\* About the lay midwife in Coromandel. When I was national secretary I corresponded with a group in Thames who called themselves the Thames/Coromandel HBA, after I advised them how to go about setting up a branch. I was aware that they were having home births, and assumed they were being attended by GPs. Later I learned that a Registered Nurse was attending them, and that they were advertising for a D.M. The co-ordinator is Beth Dreadon, Back Miranda Rd., R.D. Waitakaruru, Hauraki Plains. The secretary is Marianne Nation, 302 Fenton St., Thames.

I have had no contact with, nor heard of, Doe Pepper in Wilderlands, nor any spiritual midwife. I have recently sent them a letter asking if they know anything about this Coromandel lot, and suggested they cross out the Coromandel bit until the HBA has decided whether it openly supports lay midwifery or not.

I personally feel like you that the HBA may lose credibility with the Nurses Association, Medical Bureaucracy, politicians, etc., if we support lay midwifery, and since our main chances for change are through them, we would be silly to do it. However, I feel personally that some women may make excellent midwives without any formal professional training and certification. If a mother chooses such a midwife as her birth attendant, she has every right, I feel, to do so. I think if we formulated some sort of policy which says that:

"THE HBA cannot officially support lay midwives because this would seriously impede its powers to influence the medical system, doctors, nurses, and politicians, all of whom play an important role in the continuation and improvement of Domiciliary Midwifery in NZ today. However, it supports the right of all women to choose her own birth attendant and take the responsibility for that choice, whilst at the same time making every effort to ensure that the choice is an informed and wise one, and not one motivated by a selfish desire for a certain type of birth experience that does not consider the risks involved to the child."

I also feel that anyone should be able to be a member of the HBA, whether they have been delivered by a registered DM or a lay one. Our membership must represent all who support planned, responsible home birth. But I don't feel a branch could be formed around a lay midwife, so to speak. Nor should a branch support or have official contact with a lay midwife who might be practising in their area. These are my personal feelings.

You said in your letter that the HBA has stated that it supports only home birth attended by a professional midwife, but I have no record of this anywhere. The "Aims and Beliefs" sheet of the NZHBA only states as one of its aims (no. 5, c.), to work towards a sound domiciliary midwifery service, with a midwife and/or doctor attending. We have not specified that this midwife should be a professional one. I feel therefore that we need to take the matter for discussion to all branches before we make a policy. I have sent your letter and Doe's to Nicky Conroy, since she is really the person to organise the whole thing of finding out what branches think.

Lynne asked me to accompany her on her interview with Aussie Malcolm two weeks ago, since Jennifer, our other midwife didn't want to. I have written a detailed report of the meeting to go in the next national newsletter. I have mixed feelings about the meeting- in some ways it was positive and in some ways little was achieved. He announced to us that he has secured a 17% increase in a DM's pay, effective from 1st. October, 1982. Of course they won't actually receive it until after the price and wage freeze has been lifted. I can't help feeling that all these small increases he comes up with every now and then are just a way of humouring us and defusing the situation abbit. He claimed to still not have received the MSC report, and therefore couldn't comment on it. He also said it could be some months after he has seen it before it is printed and released by the public. So we have plenty of time to prepare our arguments and counter-recommendations- unless he is lying, to keep us at bay.

Wellington Hospital is about to have a water birth under its roof. A very clever way of counteracting their negative reputation.

We have at last received the computer printout of the latest home birth statistics. Dunedin have a copy too. I will be writing a summary of them in the next national newsletter.

One last thing- at the meeting with Aussie, the Director of Clinical Services was present. He asked me if we were still charging \$75 for home births, as suggested in one of your past newsletters. I explained to him that this was never put into effect, but he would like a formal, written assurance of this. So could you do that for him please? His name is John Phillips, and he seems a very fair sort of chap- listened supportively to Lynne and agrees with the midwives' wishes for greater antenatal involvement etc.. Our member, Dave West, who has had experience with Government bureaucracy and lobbying, thinks that he is the kind of person we should be working on to affect changes. Aussie certainly seems to seek his advice and listen to it. He asked Lynne to get the DMs to clearly formulate what they want in the way of changes by September, since this is the end of a 'Cycle' of bureaucratic decision-making, or something, for things that are to take effect next year.

Well, I think that's about it. Saw the article about birth practices in the NZ Women's Weekly- the home birth section was excellent, I thought.

Regards,



Henriette.