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OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

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Mr & Mrs B J & A I Macfarlane  
11 Manapau Street  
Meadowbank  
AUCKLAND 5

Dear Mr & Mrs Macfarlane

Thank you for your letter on home births.

I have only once made public comment on this subject, and in context I believe I did so correctly. As is so often the case my initial comment was widely misrepresented by others who apparently wanted to attack me for having dared to even express an opinion.

My concern was and is that just as having a baby is a natural event so too is it natural for some babies to be disabled or to die during the birth process.

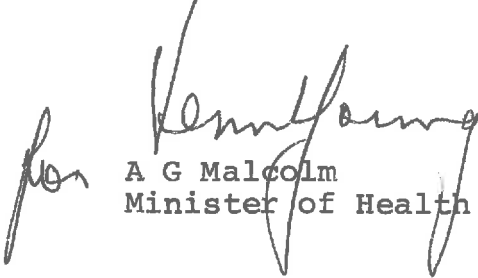
As a result of good supervision during pregnancy and delivery and appropriate intervention when necessary there has been a substantial reduction in mortality and morbidity of both mother and child. However, regardless of the level of child mortality the probability of dying is at its peak at the time of birth so it is at this time that the optimum services and facilities should be available.

In fact my comment was divided equally in two directions and, bearing in mind that I was talking to an audience of Perinatologists, an even half of my comment was divided to raising the issue of what they might be doing in their hospitals to drive some parents away. I am very familiar with what some hospitals do to their maternity patients. I do not accept they should or need to do these things.

The ideal, in my view, is for all risks to be absolutely minimised by as many births as possible taking place in hospital and for hospitals to ensure that all steps are taken to ensure that this is a safe and a rewarding process in every sense for both parents and child.

I accept that many of the arguments of the home birth movement are very valid ones. But I also believe they are arguments for change in our hospitals not arguments for avoiding our hospitals.

Yours sincerely

A G Malcolm  
Minister of Health