

Legal action may be taken regarding St Helens closure

LEGAL action and a petition may be launched in an effort to overturn the decision by the Minister of Health (Mr Gair) that St Helens Maternity Hospital should close.

Mrs Ann Turner, of the St Helens Action Group, said today her group would meet to consider taking out a Court injunction against the decision.

The group would consider advice from its legal adviser and would also look at launching a petition, which she was certain would receive wide public support.

She said the Minister's decision was "ill - advised and deplorable" as St Helens was a highly successful community service, and Wellington women would now not have a choice where to have their babies.

She said she understood the birth rate at St Helens has gone up recently which brought into question the planning of maternity services on birth statistics.

There had been a lack of research into the requirements of mothers and the

new block had too many four-bed cubicles.

There was a danger that women in the new hospital would be "over-examined" by medical students.

Parking was more difficult at Wellington Hospital than it was at St Helens, and that would discourage visitors.

She was also sceptical of the minister's assurance that women would still be able to be attended by the doctor of their choice.

Wellington's only domiciliary midwife, Ms Lyn McLean, said the closure of St Helens would almost certainly increase the demand for births at home.

"So many women won't want the type of intensive care that will be offered in the new unit.

"The new unit will be like the National Women's Hospital in Auckland which is just what women don't. It's like a factory - there's no personalised care, and nobody's particularly interested unless there's an abnormality.

"I'm quite sure that by the end of the year there will be a need for two domiciliary midwives because it is such a good alternative.

Regret

The chairman of the Wellington faculty of the College of General Practitioners (Dr John Sarfati) said the decision was most regrettable.

He said: "We must now ensure that the new block at Wellington hospital is run for the mothers, and not for the students, be they nursing, under-graduates, or post-graduates."

He said he thought mothers, in particular, were going to be upset by the Government's decision.

The principal nurse of St Helens, Miss Joy Motley, said the decision was inevitable and she was relieved it had finally been made.

Staff had been under some strain, and the lack of decision had created some problems.

Nostalgia

"I am pleased for the staff of Wellington's obstetric unit and St Helens as decisions can now be made on how services could get together."

She added that she,

nevertheless, felt nostalgic for St Helens.

The president of the Wellington branch of the Nurses' Association, Mrs Anne Somerville, said: "We think the nurses of St Helens will be sad, but we support them and feel sure they will take with them the quality of care into the new block."

The Wellington Hospital Board's chief nursing officer, Miss Elaine Whiteman, said she, too, was pleased that a decision had been reached.

"I think this is most important," she said.

"We are looking forward to establishing a really good, modern obstetric nursing service in the new hospital."

Happy

Also happy was the board's chief executive (Mr Fred Fergusson) who said he was pleased the decision had been made, and that it had gone the way the board recommended.

The president of the Wellington Parents' Centre (Mrs Ruth-Mary James) said the closure was inevitable but disappointing.

"Mothers will be worse off."

Rooming-in would be very difficult in the new block.

"It will be impossible to have successful rooming-in if four mothers and four babies are all in the same room.

"Bonding between the mother and her baby will be detrimentally affected.

"I understand the new block has very large nurseries - they must be expecting problems.

She was worried that in the long term women would not be able to have the doctor of their choice attending their birth.