

Birth centre wanted for normal cases

A GROUP of Wellington women want to establish an alternative birth centre to avoid the intrusion of high technology into child bearing.

The idea has gathered momentum in the last few months as women have waited for the inevitable announcement that St Helens Hospital would be closed when the new Wellington Women's Hospital is opened in June next year.

A leading figure in the informal group of 30 women, Ms Ros Capper, said today the birth centre could provide an alternative for women who felt home deliveries were unacceptable and for women who felt hospital deliveries were not suitable.

Ms Capper said the centre could be right in a hospital.

"In Perth, they have one. It's just two suites with double beds, and the staff go in only when they are invited.

"It's really like a motel, with the facilities of a hospital very close if anything goes wrong."

She said the idea had not been pursued with hospital authorities yet because, until now, they had been waiting for the decision of the Minister of Health (Mr Gair) on the future of St Helens.

She said it was most important to remember that 99 percent of deliveries were normal.

And she and other women were worried that in the new

has to be done so women know what the decision to close St Helens and open the new hospital means, and what high technology means.

"Do they know what fetal monitoring means? Electrodes will be clipped onto the scalps of all babies before they are born. Sometimes the scalp doesn't heal for months.

"The safety of monitoring hasn't been proven, but it is known that if fetal monitoring is practised the caesarean rate goes up.

"I think it is disgusting — that's why we have to work hard to find an alternative," Ms Capper said.

Ms Capper is a nurse who has worked at St Helens. The group includes two midwives.

Mothballs or different use

St Helens Hospital may be mothballed or converted for the care of geriatrics and other longterm patients.

These are two options facing the Wellington Hospital Board now that the Minister of Health (Mr Gair) has announced the hospital will close.

St Helens, the region's largest maternity unit, will close its delivery suites and wards in June next year, 15 years after the building was opened.

The closure will be timed to coincide with the opening of the Wellington Women's Hospital, known until recently as the obstetric and gynaecology (O and G) block.

The Hospital Board's chief executive (Mr Fred Ferguson) said today that at the time the board decided to close the hospital it had the intention of using it for continuing-care patients.

"The plans we had, which we saw as entirely practicable may now not be possible in the short term," he said.

"It depends on the attitude of the Government.

No reason

Asked whether economic restraints could force the board to mothball St Helens, he said: "In these times anything is possible."

Opposition MPs said today there was no reason for the Government to scrap a maternity unit like St Helens.

The reaction came from Labour's health spokesman (Mr Jonathon Hunt), Eastern Hutt's MP (Mr Trevor Young) who chairs Labour's health committee and five Wellington regional Labour MPs.

They were Mr Fraser Colman (Pencarrow), Mr Frank O'Flynn (Island Bay), Mr John Terris (Western Hutt), Mr Ron Bailey (Heraunga) and Porirua's Dr Gerard Wall.

They attacked the decision by the Minister of Health (Mr Gair) which, they said, could have been avoided with a little more flexibility.

There was no reason to scrap the unit with its proven record of maternity care specially when research has shown that most women prefer the "rooming-in" single room facilities at St Helens, they said.

Once again health planners and decision makers had over-ridden the real wishes of the people.



MS ROS CAPPER

spital all women would be treated as if their births were abnormal. "I think a lot of education