

# Home-Births Regarded As Almost Form Of Child Abuse

CHRISTCHURCH, Dec 13 (PA).—The increasing trend for babies to be delivered at home could amount to a form of child abuse as it robbed babies of the optimal chances of survival, a New Zealand-born professor of paediatrics, gynaecology, and obstetrics in the United States said in Christchurch today.

Professor S L James, who has been with the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre in New York since 1955, said in an interview that he was surprised at the numbers of New Zealand parents who were becoming attracted to the idea of home deliveries.

Overseas research, which would be applicable here, showed that about 10 percent of pregnancies regarded as "normal" developed difficulties requiring special care.

## Important

"For this reason alone complications can't be foreseen and it is of the utmost importance to the mother and the child to have the baby

where optimum care can be given.

"To do otherwise is almost a form of child abuse and to opt out of this responsibility denies the new-born child the rights to a full and complete life after birth," he said.

Professor James said he understood the popular reasons for some parents choosing to have a baby at home.

"The idea is to return to nature to see labour as normal, but the proponents of these ideas forget that in the 'good old days' when a baby was born at home there was a high rate of infant and maternal deaths and often life-long problems for the child."

Professor James said those

who belonged to "right to life" movements would be well advised to take a more active role in educating the public on the importance of hospital births for babies.

"Who is going to be the advocate for the foetus? If the parents abrogate their responsibility, then it must be taken over by the medical profession, which has the responsibility to educate them to show the potential hazards of home deliveries."

Professor James said that in advancing reasons against hospital births of home deliveries cited the increasing impersonal attitudes of large hospitals.

"This is a factor which has to be reckoned with but hospitals in this country have made and are making special efforts to overcome these problems."

During the last two months Professor James has been visiting maternity units in Palmerston North, Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Dunedin, the Bay of Plenty, Hamilton, Auckland, and Christchurch on a James Wattie visiting professorship.

## Home births:

# Reasons have to be right

Parents are entitled to a choice on where their baby is born, according to one North Shore doctor who handles home confinements.

"It is incredible that anybody should have the right to stand up and say 'you must have your baby in hospital' — that is one of the reasons why I do home deliveries," he says.

The doctor, who for professional reasons remains anonymous, became involved in home births two years ago.

"There was a woman ringing around the doctors at the time seeking a home delivery — I told her to come and I intended giving her all the reasons why she couldn't do it.

"However, she was a very persuasive young woman and I accepted her as a patient and delivered her baby."

Dr A sees the home birth movement as part of a universal trend among young people toward more natural things.

"Young people are moving away from the mechanistic view of things towards more natural methods of all sorts of things, including child-birth," he says.

"They see a hospital delivery as rather a clinical experience and one they don't particularly care for."

Dr A says he has noticed some changes in hospital routines as a result of the home birth movement.

"There have been quite big improvements," he says.

"They say armies are run by sergeants — well, hospitals are run by the midwives and the midwives are becoming more aware.

"They no longer do things like whisk the baby away straight after birth and so on.

"Things are getting better in terms of service to the patient and the midwives seem to be the ones who are doing this."

Dr A does not necessarily agree with the home birth critics who point to hospitals as the ideal place

to be if problems arise during delivery.

"If I'm running into problems at North Shore Hospital then the mother will be transferred to National Women's."

"It's just as easy to transfer a mother from her home as it is from a hospital."

"I have had only one patient in 15 years who has had to be transferred on an urgent basis."

Dr A does not accept everyone who wishes to have a home delivery.

"The whole home birth movement would fall into disrepute if a patient was put to any major risk," he says.

"If it's a second baby the past obstetric history is very valuable and pretty reliable."

"I was reluctant to accept first deliveries initially but I do some now."

"I take into account such things as age, weight and just the 'feeling' I have about the case."

"There are things you cannot predict of course — Cases such as breech births or twins I handle in hospital, especially as the mortality rate in breech births is still surprisingly high."

"If I have any doubts about a case I refer them to a specialist for a second opinion."

Dr A says he attends his patients during delivery but prefers to stay in the background as much as possible.

He says hospital deliveries are easier work for him, but he enjoys home deliveries.

"One of the things about home deliveries that still amazes me is that I have never seen a baby who needed resuscitation, probably because the mothers do not use narcotics in labour."

"I have learnt a great deal about natural child-birth and the way birth should be since I've been involved with the home birth movement."

He says his home delivery patients are well motivated and well informed.

"They are dedicated to the whole idea and unless they are I don't think I'd be prepared to do a confinement at home," he says.

"To simply think you don't want to go to hospital because you'd rather stay home is not the right reason."

## Births at home are unfair to others'

WOMEN who insist on having babies at home are putting other mothers and babies at risk, according to a top doctor.

He says the health service has not got the resources to cope with childbirth emergencies both in hospital and at home.

Mr Raymond Booth, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Basildon Hospital in Essex, said: "If there is a crisis during childbirth at home, a flying squad of four highly trained medical staff has to be called out from the local hospital where they are probably just as badly needed. We just do not have enough staff to deal with emergencies in the home and at hospital at the same time."

## Danger

Dr Booth, who was speaking to members of the National Child-birth Trust, said: "Being born is the most dangerous part of living, so why on earth should women want to give birth in their homes away from the equipment and staff who could save their baby's life if anything went wrong?"

"At present 97 per cent. of women give birth in hospital. I see no reason at all why they should suffer because of the 3 per cent. who want to have their babies at home."