

## Home birth supported

Mr Editor: I was disturbed to read comments by the Minister of Health, Mr Malcolm, on home births. According to Professor G. J. Kloosterman, head of obstetrics and gynaecology in Amsterdam, two-thirds of all pregnant women will deliver naturally and need only be attended by midwives.

Holland has a consistently low infant mortality; 11.1 per cent in 1971 compared with 18.5 per cent in the U.S. and a consistently high rate of successful home deliveries.

In a group of 20,000 deliveries by midwives no doctors were needed. Holland's maternal mortality rate in 1974 was 0.4 per 10,000 births, Britain — almost complete institutionalisation of births — in 1970 the rate was: 1 woman died per 6000 births.

New Zealand has had about 1000 home births to date in the last few years with very good results, in fact the quality of a home birth cannot be equalled (for a normal birth) by a hospital one. There is much less danger of cross infection, of drugs, and instruments being used during birth and the mother's screening and preparations for and relaxed feelings in a familiar environment during birth make the birth usually proceed very quickly and easily.

What Mr Malcolm should do, is give the fully qualified domiciliary midwives their rightful proper salaries and better access to hospital supplies (e.g. sterile packs). Some hospitals have recognised this need and are very co-operative. Some people will always want to be able to opt for a home birth and it would be better if they had the help of qualified midwives.

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