

Home births going on without midwives' aid

AUCKLAND, Today (PA). — Some women are delivering their own babies at home because the Health Department has forced many qualified domiciliary midwives out of business, says the Home Birth Association.

Association spokesman Dr Deryn Cooper said the department's system of paying home birth midwives meant most earned a maximum of about \$8000 a year.

Financial hardship and heavy opposition from the medical profession had forced six of Auckland's nine domiciliary midwives to give up during the past year.

As the number of people wanting home births increased, said Dr Cooper, many women were being forced to have their babies in hospital.

"But," she added, "what worries us most is that some women are so dedi-

cated to a natural birth at home that they are taking it into their own hands and having their babies at home without a midwife."

Some parents were also resorting to using lay midwives, who were not qualified and had no formal training.

"As far as we know there have been no deaths or injuries," said Dr Cooper, "but the Home Birth Association would not condone the delivering of babies without a qualified midwife and medical practitioner."

She said that the Health Department and a large section of the "medical hierarchy" seemed determined the home birth movement should die. They were largely to blame for the unsupervised births.

The Health Department's assistant director of clinical services, Dr Dennis Feeney, said he was not aware of any unsupervised homebirths.

"But if these people (the associa-

tion) have this kind of information, they should let us know. It's a matter of great concern to us."

Dr Feeney said women who wanted a home birth should make sure they had adequate medical supervision.

"If they can't get a domiciliary midwife, they have a duty to themselves and the baby to make sure they have access to a general practitioner or an obstetrician."

The department, he said, recognised the right of every woman to have her baby wherever she wished. It was not trying to kill the homebirth movement.

Dr Feeney said he understood negotiations to increase domiciliary midwives' fees had been going on this year.

"It seems to have gone by the board now — I suspect because of the price freeze."