

Loving birth scene

Sir, — Was Dr Cummings' description of "confinement en famille" stolen from Charles Dickens? Resorting to such a dramatically fictitious picture exhibits his lack of personal experience of natural childbirth. Our planned home-birth was not "a circus nor a spectacle for all and sundry" but a loving scene of concentrated effort as, aided by my husband and a midwife I worked to give our baby a gentle birth. Our doctor held a mirror for me and as the head crowned I called in my close friend and my sister to witness and welcome Miriam's birth.

With such warm support I needed no drugs in spite of tediously long early labour from posterior presentation. Perhaps Dr Cummings would prefer 100 per cent caesarian deliveries — nice, clean and all in the hands of the medical staff?

JESSICA MACLEAN
Whiteman's Valley

Labour room crowds upset doctor

By STEVEN PACKER



DR CUMMING . . .
"labour room no place for a circus".

FAMILIES should not be allowed to watch the "spectacle of birth", says Palmerston North Hospital Board chairman Dr A G Cumming.

Dr Cumming hits out at increasing trends toward home birth and delivery room spectators in the latest Hospital Boards' Association magazine.

"The labour room is no place for a circus nor a spectacle for all and sundry," he says.

"The mind boggles at the thought of a confinement 'en famille': mother embarrassed at not being able to conceal her distress, father doing his best to comfort her, teenagers chewing furiously to cover embarrassment, the little ones open-mouthed, wide-eyed and terrified, their fish and chips forgotten in their hands, and the youngest whimpering in a corner where he has fouled both his pants and the floor."

Dr Cumming says home birth is "a retrograde step".

Supporters of home birth claim it would be suitable only for "low risk" births, he says.

Sir, — The emotive remarks on home births and the family's presence by Dr A G Cumming cannot remain unchallenged. The description of terrified, fish-and-chip eating little children watching a woman in labour is out of character with rational observations one might expect from a medical man. When enlightened prospective parents are preparing mentally and physically for the delivery of their new baby the woman has the right to expect her husband's comfort at her hour of need.

Our children have been born at home, as was the custom in our country, without the dreadful scenes occurring as imagined by Dr Cumming. Because of the German occupation, two of our children were born before the doctor arrived and one without doctor or midwife being present. Having been there at previous births I was able to help my wife with the delivery. It was a unique experience.

In New Zealand our daughters, too, wanted their husbands present. This produced fights with a stubborn matron and necessitated a change of hospital in one case.

Our daughters could rely on the support of their husbands at the time their baby was born. None had to go through the austere, impersonal atmosphere of a hospital without some moral support.

Instead of attacking home birth and delivery room spectators, as he put it, I suggest Dr Cumming re-

strict himself to the clinical aspects of confinement and leave the emotional aspects to the parents and those who have researched the topic. After all it is the parents' child and it is their right to decide if the husband should be present at birth.

FRED W SOETERIK
Karori

Family's presence at home births

As a midwife, I discuss with prospective parents the possibility of having the older children and friends present and the decision is entirely theirs. My observation is that children are very sensitive to "atmosphere" and take their cue from the adults present; if they are calm and confident, the older children, with no cause for alarm, will greet their new brother or sister with love and affection; wide-eyed yes, but not fearful.

It saddens me that birth is still regarded by some medical personnel as dirty, and unpleasant, and cause for embarrassment. I find birth a profound and moving experience and I regard my job as a domiciliary midwife in the Hutt Valley as a wonderful privilege. To sum up: At home, babies are born into families, and not delivered in theatres.

JENNIFER SAGE
Normandale

Babies are born into families

Sir, — I can only assume that Dr Cumming's description, reported in The Dominion, of a birth "en famille" is a figment of his imagination. As a midwife who has experience of hospital and home birth, I can assure him that a "circus atmosphere" is much more likely in a hospital delivery "theatre". The dazzling lights, a high level of noise and activity by an array of hatted, gowned and masked student doctors, midwives and nurses, are familiar to doctor attendants but can seem foreign and threatening to the mother.

A birth at home is a very private and peaceful affair.

Advocates defend home births

THE WELLINGTON Home Birth Association says comments made last week by the chairman of the Palmerston North Hospital Board, Dr A G Cumming, were "emotional and ill-informed".

Dr Cumming said the practice of giving birth in the home was a medical risk and a "retrograde step". He advised hospital boards to warn people against it.

Association president Anne Turner said Dr Cumming "showed the heavy-handed rigidity and intolerance of some hospital administrators who tried to treat childbirth as an illness to be kept within hospital walls."

"Many conservative doctors simply refuse to accept home birth as an expression of the real wishes of both mother and father."

Mrs Turner said mothers seeking planned home births were strictly screened to eliminate cases where medical problems might arise.

"The result is a record of safety and success of which any hospital would be proud."

The number of planned home births has been steadily growing in Wellington and throughout New Zealand, Mrs Turner said. More mothers chose to have their babies at home under expert medical care rather than in impersonal maternity hospitals.

Dr Cumming had tried to deter mothers with talk of frightened husbands and families distressed at the scene of birth, she said.

"But planned home births take place only after antenatal visits and discussion with the family to avoid such problems."

Mrs Turner said home birth was a "sensible and economic development" which took the strain off over-extended hospital facilities and enabled the mother to have complete control of her environment during childbirth.