

Exposure Draft of the HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW 2009

Yvette Miller
to:
NRAIP
17/07/2009

I write to urge you to do what you can to amend or reject the above bill (HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW 2009). I commend the move to regulate health practitioners at the national level and to make professional indemnity insurance a requirement of national registration. However, the concomitant unavailability or provision of professional indemnity insurance for midwives caring for women birthing at home means this law will directly affect the safety, health and liberal rights of Australian women and their families. This regulation and indemnity proposal unacceptably and dangerously restricts the care of women choosing to birth at home from 1st July 2010. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that planned out-of-hospital birth attended by a midwife is an absolutely safe choice for all low-risk pregnant women (i.e., women without any serious medical problems), and there is increasing evidence that it is a healthier choice than hospital birth for women at low risk. To pass legislation that in any way limits or forbids the choice of out-of-hospital birth, or the ability of midwives willing to attend out-of-hospital births to practice, is to deny Australians the freedom to choose the healthiest option for their family and denies women the right to make choices about their own bodies. It will directly result in reduced care provision for women who choose to birth at home. Such women and families will be forced to birth without professional assistance, which we know does increase the risk of negative health outcomes for women and their babies. Therefore, this legislation is a direct threat to the well being of Australian women and babies. Our current experience in Australia is not a new one. In the 1980's the German organization of obstetricians and gynaecologists lobbied for a national law forbidding planned out-of-hospital birth, and in the 1990's the Hungarian organization of obstetricians and gynaecologists tried to get their government to forbid planned out-of-hospital birth. In both cases, an international outcry led the governments in both nations to reject such moves. I hope that my own government can follow the wisdom of these nations and avoid an international reputation for blatantly dismissing the values of a liberal and just society. Acceptance of the bill will put Australia totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand, which support the rights of women to choose homebirth and in fund care by a registered midwife to support homebirth through their national health scheme. Acceptance of the above bill must only happen alongside the Commonwealth-assisted provision of professional indemnity insurance cover for midwives attending homebirths. I implore you to look beyond unfounded claims that homebirth is unsafe, or that it is not an important choice to protect because it is the choice of only a minority in this country, and reject the proposed bill in its current form. Homebirth is not for all women, but this does not mean that it should be denied to every woman.

Yours sincerely

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