



The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans M.L.C.  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Ph: (02) 9230 2303  
Fax: (02) 9230 2866  
ace.mlc@parliament.nsw.gov.au

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Dear

Jan Burnswood MLC, Chair of the Adoption Committee referred your letter of 19 October 1999 to me, asking that I clarify the statements in the text of the Standing Committee's report of 16-17 June 1999. As you are aware, I am a member of that Committee. I apologise that I have not got back to you sooner.

I believe that you have misinterpreted my comments, such that the meaning has actually been reversed in some cases.

As you may be aware, I was present at the birth of a baby who was late adopted, and in a sense I actually delivered the baby. I was a medical student at the time, and had no control over the practices. It was my first delivery and I was horrified at what happened. I was not rostered on, but had gone to the Labour Ward at the beginning of my term to find out where it was, so that I would not have trouble finding it when I was rostered on. As we were not allowed in unless we changed into surgical garb, I did so. As I was standing there, I was asked "are you a student?- then you'd better do this delivery- quickly- it's just on view". So I delivered the baby as per the textbook. I had never even seen a delivery before. I had not even met the mother. As the baby came out the nursing staff said to me- "keep it low and put it on the trolley". I did as I was told. I had realised as I went in that 'BFA' (Baby for Adoption) was on the head of the bed, but did not know the protocol. I assumed that the mother knew the protocol, and had already signed. Obviously, this was not so.

The single mothers were stigmatised, and the students had more to do with them than the private patients, as most private patients were 'off limits' to the students. In fact the young woman that I delivered was a private patient, and the obstetrician who was late, kicked me out of the room as soon as he arrived as students were not supposed to be there with private patients. He then delivered the placenta.

I had explained this to the committee, but have not stated it publicly, as Jan Burnswood had said that it was unnecessary.

In the transcript of evidence that you quote, I was explaining the state of knowledge of the junior staff, who presumed that:

1. Since they were classified BFA, the mothers must know that this what was going to happen.
2. The prevailing attitude was 'that the young woman who made a mistake should be able to get on with her life'.

As stated above, I was shocked by what happened and did not have any personal control over it, though as you point out I was a 'party'. I was conscious that the woman giving birth was very

similar to my own girlfriend, so I was certainly not going to judge her for having sex, or think that it was an immaculate conception.

In summary, the transcript is as you quote it. I was however, stating what the perspective of the junior staff was. The committee understood this, and it was my understanding that all those present did also. The perspective may have been lost in the transcript.

It is possible that some mothers thought that this was my opinion, but most of the mothers are aware that I have been most keen to question consent takers and those who ran the system and that the mothers are happy that I am working in their interest. The quotes that you cite are not my opinions, nor do I support them.

I hope that this clarifies the situation, and I hope that you have not suffered anxiety because of my delay in this clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC  
Australian Democrats