

Rachele Meredith

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The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Committee  
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Parliament House  
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To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in regards to the ongoing Senate Inquiry into National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Doctors and Other Health Workers.

While there are many positive aspects to a national scheme to regulate the health professions, there is one glaring problem that I am concerned about.

One aspect of the scheme is that professional indemnity insurance is a requirement for registration. There is one group of health professionals who cannot access any professional indemnity insurance product; that group is midwives in private practice.

As the proposed legislation stands, this group of professionals will be unable to renew their registration, in effect be deregistered, although they have done nothing wrong nor acted improperly.

I used the services of a midwife in private practice during my last two childbearing experiences. There is no other model of care that provides continuity of carer throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period. I could not access this level of continuity through the public system or through a private obstetrician. Although the government doesn't fund the services of private midwives, I was happy to pay a lot of money for the care as it is so exceptional. It is unbelievable that midwives in private practice will, in effect, be deregistered as they are unable, not unwilling, to access any form of professional indemnity insurance!

I was so impressed with the level of care I received from a midwife in private practice that I resigned from my job as a school teacher and enrolled in the Bachelor of Midwifery course in 2007 with the intention of going into private practice upon registration. I want to provide women with this exceptional care option. My husband, young children and I have made enormous sacrifices in order for me to take part in this rigorous training. I am utterly shocked to realise that when I finish my degree in December of this year, I may only have six months as a registered midwife before finding myself unable to register, and therefore, unable to practice legally!

Private midwifery care provides women with a true continuity of carer option. This type of care results in lower intervention rates in birth, less need for pain relief, healthier babies, happier mothers, higher breastfeeding rates with all the roll on health effects that result from this, and lower rates of postnatal depression in mothers. Please do not allow this model of care to disappear!

Another concern is that women who do not have access to midwifery care in their homes during birth may choose to birth unassisted rather than go to hospital and birth amongst strangers. I am in NSW and there have been several babies that have died in this state during unassisted homebirths. While I do not know for certain what the causes of death were, there is plenty of research to support the safety of midwife-attended homebirth. There is very little research around unassisted birth but we can only assume that it would be more dangerous than birth attended by a trained and registered health professional.

I request that the requirement of professional indemnity insurance for registration be reviewed. This legislation should not be passed until all health professionals have access to professional indemnity insurance if it is to be a requirement of registration. If the legislation is to be passed there should be a clause that temporarily exempts health professionals from this requirement until an insurance product is available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me in regards to this matter.

Yours sincerely,  
Rachele Meredith