

Birth in Brief

The monthly bulletin of Maternity Coalition, Victoria

Issue 2: October 05

Editorial

Thank you to everyone who sent in news for October's bulletin. Keep it coming; I'll accept articles at any time during the month.

Childbirth was in and out of the news media in September, which acted as a reminder for me that we need to keep working to get our message out there or risk getting branded as a bunch of masochistic fanatics. Are we really the 'Natural Birth Lobby'? That seems to be the favoured name for anyone daring to oppose the obstetric hierarchy.

After reading one particularly vicious exchange I sulked dejectedly, 'Why on earth do I bother? Am I just a religious zealot, encouraging women to put their lives and their babies lives at risk?' I was in danger of believing in someone else's press. So I had a good think about what drives me to volunteer with Maternity Coalition. And this is what I came up with:

There are only two things a woman needs when preparing to give birth: access to the facts, not terrifying anecdotes, but the hard numbers about safety and outcomes, so that she can make her own decision about the birth she wants; and the support to birth her baby in the way that she then chooses. That's what I believe in: not pain versus anesthetic, not midwives versus doctors, not home versus hospital, just reliable information and choice. That's what all women should have access to. Read on!

Newborn Screening Advisory Group

Kelly Stewart

On 30th September, Leslie and I represented consumers on the newborn screening advisory group for the 2nd time. Issues under review include informed consent newborn screening genetic testing (i.e. the heel-prick blood test for conditions such as cystic fibrosis and PKU). The Health Issues Centre is running the project on behalf of DHS.

The meeting brings together stakeholders from various departments including DHS, the Privacy Commission and Genetic Health Services Victoria. The Health Issues Centre have conducted various interviews with Midwives in Private Practice, hospital midwives, obstetricians, GPs and of course consumers — both antenatal and postnatal parents. Lively and healthy discussions occurred regarding what constitutes informed consent, ownership, storage and later use of the test cards.

The next meeting in late October will discuss various models for achieving informed consent. Leslie and I are looking forward to being able to provide the consumer voice to this meeting.

Funding for MC

Leslie Arnott

At the recent newborn screening advisory group meeting that was attended by Kelley Stewart and myself, I spoke briefly with the Health Issues Centre's (HIC) CEO regarding the possibility of seeking funding for MC. This request was

based on a discussion I had with a WA consumer representative at a Conference in Adelaide earlier this year, who informed me that she was paid and employed for her advocacy work.

In speaking with HIC it was agreed that funding for specific consumer organizations in Victoria was long overdue and that a meeting would be called shortly with MC Vic and other similar organisations to discuss the possibility of funding. Whilst this is in its very infant stage (no meeting has even been held yet) it is reassuring to know that there are avenues to be explored regarding the possibility of MC Vic being funded for its work.

Midwifery-Led Care Implementation Group

Isis Caple

I attended my first meeting as the Consumer Representative, with the Midwifery-Led Care Implementation Group (MLCIG) that Geelong Hospital has begun. It was an interesting meeting. I got to put some faces to familiar names, and to get a feel for the general attitude towards changing their current system of care. It is a very positive group they have, with all aspects being explored. I made sure they knew that I was VERY interested in keeping myself (as the consumer) in the loop, and that I was willing to point out my perspective when they got a bit lost in policy and medical debate. I won't be in the country to attend the meeting on 17th October, but will be attending the next one on 21st November.

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Sophie Pandopoulos

Leslie Arnott

On August 25 Joy Johnston and I traveled up to Mansfield with Marg Hawkes (midwife from the Angliss birth Centre) to present to Sophie Pandopoulos, a Federal backbencher. One of our constituents, Cath Fitzgerald, had organised the meeting through her father-in-law, who happens to be the local Mansfield MP.

Our main aim was to make sure that Sophie was aware of the significant and unnecessary barriers faced by women who seek primary maternity care from a known midwife. We also highlighted the gross inequity in maternity services provision, especially for those women in rural and remote areas. By using documentation compiled by Bruce Teakle (QLD MC President), and by drawing on information provided by the many stakeholders present that day, we were able to outline the urgent need for the federal government to include midwives under the current Medicare scheme.

This meeting is one of a series of meetings that are taking place across Australia with other MC constituents who are also lobbying liberal and national backbench members. These meetings will then culminate in a presentation to the entire backbench committee by MC's national vice president, Lisa Metcalfe and NSW president Carol Chapman. Stay tuned to MC's Birth Matters for further details as they come to hand!

Perinatal Data

Joy Johnston

The Victorian Hospital Profiles of Perinatal Data for 2004 have been published by the Perinatal Data Collection Unit <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/perinatal/pdca.htm>. Each hospital receives a summary of its own births for that year, compared with average outcomes for hospitals of various sizes, and state averages. Homebirths are collected into one report.

This year's report gives trends in selected variables, 1999-2004. Variables include statewide, private and public rates of spontaneous onset of labour without augmentation, induced labour, epidural &c for primipars, and multipara in labour, spontaneous vaginal births, operative births, and caesareans. The rate of caesareans in that time has gone from 22.8% to 29.4%.

The number of women having homebirths has risen from 132 in 1999 to 181 in 2004, out of 62,348 women giving birth. There were 254 unplanned out of hospital births, and 1,229 births in Birth Centres.

More details are available from independent midwives <http://www.maternitycoalition.org.au/mipps.html>, or from maternity hospitals.

PCMEE

Leslie Arnott

Consumer representation from MC continues on MSAC's subcommittees for Performance Indicators, and Pregnancy Care

and Maternity Emergency Education (PCMEE). Already ten sites across Victoria have received the PCMEE and we have just been notified that this training program has secured further funding for continuation throughout 2006.

What does all this mean? It means that more and more primary maternity care providers will be made available for those women seeking their care throughout rural and metropolitan regions across Victoria.

The following sites have already received the education program and will soon be ready to provide various levels of primary care to their communities: Loddon (Mallee Bendigo Health Care Group and Kyneton District Health Service), Barwon South Western (Barwon Health and Timboon and District, HS/Terang and Mortlake), HS/Campberdown (Grampians Wimmera Health Care Group), Horsham and East Wimmera (Health Care Service, St Arnaud), Hume (Alpine Health, Myrtleford, Bright and Mt Beauty and Benalla), Gippsland (Orbost Regional Health/Bairnsdale and Bass Coast Regional Health), Wonthaggi South (Casey Hospital), North and West (The Northern and Mercy Hospital for Women), East (Box Hill).

Choices for Childbirth

October 3 Homebirth
October 10 Supporting Your Partner
October 17 Labour Pain
October 24 Breastfeeding
November 7 Sleeping Soundly
November 14 VBAC
Phone Jules on 9537 1886.

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CARES SA Handbook

Jo Bainbridge

CARES SA have just finished a 70+ page document covering all the issues about Birth After Caesarian Section. It covers common myths then follows up with current abstracts, highlights policies and management, outcomes and so on.

We will be willing to supply email versions for people at a small cost, perhaps a CARES membership of \$20 pa. Further details will be available for those interested <http://homepages.picknowl.com.au/caressa>.

With Woman Gatherings

Louise Taylor

Last week on the spring equinox, a small (8) and passionate number of women met at Ceres.

We all saw the need to debrief and come together to offer support, a desire to be educated about the normal physiological aspects of birth and to share in joy and fun.

There was also conversation about the difficulties of sisterhood within the various professions, maybe midwifery most of all with peer pressure being present in certain environments making changes difficult. The idea that we were

suppressed women in danger of suppressing women was aired.

On the flip side we talked about the amount of power women had as both consumers and professionals if only we can realise it.

Beautiful stories were shared and strong reminders of how wonderful this work truly is. We christened the group 'With Woman Gatherings'.

Now we are in spring, a wonderful fertile time for women. Let our inner creativity shine as we help to empower ourselves and women in their time of pregnancy, birth and motherhood.

Next Gatherings are Saturday 8th October and Saturday 12th November. Lets come together to honour ourselves, birthing women and to create an ever-growing, strong network of women to effect change.

The bit at the end

Spare a thought for Ignaz Semmelweis. I've just been reading the fascinating *Blood and Guts: A Short History of Medicine* (Roy Porter, Penguin), which relates that Semmelweis was a doctor working in the maternity wards of nineteenth century

Vienna. He saw that far more women died of puerperal fever when attended by doctors than midwives, so he instigated a rule of hand washing for all doctors.

This cut the death rate drastically, but Semmelweis was hounded out of Vienna (for propounding the offensive idea that doctors caused infection) and later died in a lunatic asylum. Poor Semmelweis! But, a reminder that it's the simplest solutions that save the most lives.

And because no one sent in any photographs this month, here's another picture of my Sam.



OCTOBER DIARY

8 th Oct	9.30–12.30	With Woman Gatherings. Ceres Environmental Park, in the cafe.
11 th Oct	19.00	Natural birth support group, 43 Gladesville Drive, East Bentleigh
19 th Oct	9.00–16.00	Rediscovering the Magic of Instinctive Birthing with Lina Clerke at Rosebud Midwifery Clinic. Brenda Manning on 59862535/0409194623