

Letter for Publication

The Times
16th April 2009

Dear Editor,

Despite Melanie Reid's opinion (Give me hospital over home birth any day 16.04.09) not all 'women are hard wired to go to hospital and have babies there'.

Since 2000, home births have risen 54% compared with a 14 per cent rise in total numbers of births, showing that home birth is an increasingly popular option.

The extent to which women have home births ranges from less than one per cent to over 14 per cent in different local authorities. In England and Wales, seven local authorities have a home birth rate of over 10 per cent.

Women choose home births for varying reasons from a desire to avoid interventions in childbirth, to avoiding separation from older children. Some have had previous bad experiences in hospital, and others simply do not see the need to have subsequent children there.

The Dutch study shows that home births are as safe as hospital births. In the past, evidence on the safety of planned home birth has been obscured because studies have included high risk women or women who developed complications during pregnancy, or has included studies that are not large enough to see if there are any differences in perinatal mortality between home and hospital.

For a healthy woman with a straightforward, low-risk pregnancy there is no evidence to show that a home birth is less safe than a hospital birth provided the midwife is experienced and has the back up of a modern hospital system, should transfer be needed. Planned home births actually involve less medical intervention and less illness for both mothers and babies

However, many women around the UK still find it difficult to access a home birth.

There is a lack of balanced information available to women to enable them to make a choice about where to have their baby and low midwifery staffing levels mean that too often the option of a home birth is either not being offered or services end up being withdrawn at short notice.

If the Government's choice guarantee for England which says women should be able to give birth at home is to be implemented by the end of 2009, considerable work must be done to increase access to home birth. Similarly, all women in other parts of the UK should be able to access home births if they wish. In Wales, ministers set a ten per cent target for home births which increased the growth in

home birth faster than in other UK countries and this exemplary work needs to continue. And Scotland's Keeping Childbirth Natural and Dynamic (KCND) programme has plans to increase home birth rates also.

The NCT hears from hundreds of women each year who want to have a home birth and we support them, as we do for those who choose other types of births. We owe it to support women in their choice of place of birth.

Yours faithfully

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