

Dear Home Birth Families,

I have a friend who was planning for her first child (as much as these things can be planned) a water birth in a nearby birthing unit. However, as her waters had broken a certain amount of time before labour commenced, she was given antibiotics which she, unfortunately, had an adverse reaction to. Therefore, she was subsequently transferred to the base hospital wherein the previously unplanned intervention began: intravenous pitocin to augment the labour, which had stalled upon reaching the hospital, followed by an epidural to cope with the increased pain of the augmented labour, fetal monitoring, and ultimately a forceps-assisted delivery due to a decreased ability to push effectively - a far cry from the earlier hoped-for water birth.

I recently went to one of the Christchurch Home Birth Midwives information evenings where I heard that only 2.5% of women who enter Christchurch Women's Hospital have a natural birth. This is astounding considering that the World Health Organisation (WHO) states that 80% of women should be able to have a normal birth with no intervention. Furthermore, over 80% of women in New Zealand are birthing at secondary or tertiary maternity units with specialized care, rather than at either a primary birthing unit or at home (see article, page 12).

The differences between birthing at home and birthing in a hospital are too numerous to list here, however, two were mentioned at the information evening which stand out in my mind (all of the home birth midwives were originally trained as nurses and have worked in hospital maternity wards, and as such, they are in a good position to compare and contrast the two systems). First, they mentioned that babies born at home are significantly more alert than their counterparts born in hospital, presumably because their little bodies are not full of the drugs normally given to a labouring woman in hospital. Secondly, there is little continuity of care in a hospital, with midwives/nurses coming and going as their shifts change. I know which system I prefer!

I have another acquaintance who secretly wanted a home birth for her second child (as many women do if they have not had a satisfying birthing experience with their first child), but for whatever reason, chose to go with a hospital birth. However, as is the case with many second labours, this one progressed so rapidly that she did indeed end up having her baby at

home, and of course was thrilled that she had. Unfortunately, she later hemorrhaged and had to be transferred to the base hospital and as a result feels some resentment towards the midwives involved as she feels that they are at least partially to blame for what happened.

After hearing this story I couldn't help wondering that if she had planned a home birth from the beginning and been attended by experienced home birth midwives, whether the outcome may have been better. Many studies have shown that *planned* home births are as safe, if not safer, than hospital births, however, the statistics for unplanned home births (which are analogous to giving birth in the car on the way to the hospital) are often combined with the statistics for planned home births, thus making them seem less safe.

Nevertheless, both of the women mentioned above had beautiful, healthy children, which is ultimately the desired outcome, and so is the method of birth really that important in the long run? Some would say so ... others may disagree. Thank you for your continued support of the home birth association and its work to support and promote natural birth at home.

Anitra Carr

NB. In this issue we have an article on the Mooncup by Clare Ella (see page 10). Did you know that one woman uses 10,000 tampons and napkins during her lifetime. The Mooncup is a bell shaped cup around 5 cm long and made from soft silicone. It is worn internally like a tampon and forms a seal with your vaginal wall allowing menstrual fluid to flow into it without leakage or odour. The Mooncup is comfortable and easy to use. Since the Mooncup is not yet available in NZ, Clare has ordered 15 from the UK (10 for women who have had babies, 5 for women who have not), so if you are interested, feel free to contact me and I will forward your message on to her. They are \$48 each, which includes postage (and is less than individual UK orders).

