AIMS For a better birth...

Birth by yourselves...

AIMS Journal, 2010, Vol 22 No 1

Maria Newcastle tells her story

I had a baby girl, Matilda, at home a fortnight ago. It was a lovely birth; however, the labour was somewhat complicated by being told that we could choose either a hospital birth or birth at home by ourselves.

When my partner Neil phoned to ask for the on-call team to be contacted, he was told that they had just gone out to another home birth and that we 'had' to come into hospital. He was a complete trooper, and maintained that we had booked for a home birth, were not going to be coming into hospital and we were looking forward to seeing a midwife. Over the course of three or four phone calls, one with my sister, we were told:

- If we intended to stay at home, there would be no midwife in attendance
- If we chose to stay at home for the birth, we should call an ambulance if any problems arose
- That if a midwife was sent from delivery suite to provide care for me, I would be depriving other women of care.

It was extremely fortunate that the first lady gave birth very quickly and the team got to me in time. It was also helpful to the situation, though not to me, that the stress of listening to the phone conversations and mentally sorting out a staffing problem caused my contractions to wane from 40-45 seconds every two minutes to 25-30 seconds every five or six minutes. Eileen, the midwife who came out to me, agreed with me that it was the stress that caused my labour to ease off so much and was responsible for making it so long. This labour was just over six hours - my previous labours were four and three hours.

The staff at the hospital did nothing to try to arrange alternative midwifery cover, and if the first woman had not delivered so quickly, I'm not sure anyone would have come out to me. I was at the point of thinking that I would have to go in, when Eileen called to say she was on her way and would be with me as soon as she could. Despite my total belief that I can birth my babies perfectly well without assistance (and in the event I did - Matilda was born in water and no one touched her or me until she was a good 10 minutes old), I could not make a decision to decline any care whatsoever ; the nurse in me needed someone to listen in to check the baby was coping, and I needed the two midwives, and two students, drinking tea in the corner for me to really let go and get into my labour!

Anyway, I intend to make a complaint to the Trust about being denied care at home, and my husband being encouraged to deliver the baby himself (I'm sure he'd be more than capable in an emergency, but

this was not a time-critical situation) with paramedic back-up. I was able to stand my ground, and direct my husband and sister to do the same, in a way that I wouldn't have done had this been my first baby. I also feel that many women wouldn't have had the confidence or knowledge to be so firm in the face of what felt like blackmail and bullying, and while I'm glad I am capable of assertion even in labour, I am furious on the part of the many women who would not be.

AIMS Comment

This situation, and variants of it, is a tactic frequently used to coerce women into hospital. If a woman calls a midwife, there is a duty to attend, but women frequently do not know they can refuse to transfer. This adds unnecessary stress to pregnancy and labour, and is not good for mother or baby.