



Dr Ágnes Geréb - update

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Donal Kerry continues the campaign against injustice

Dr Ágnes Geréb is the leading obstetrician and midwife in Hungary attending women to birth at home. She has been providing this unique service to Hungarian mothers for some 17 years. She and her midwifery team attended over 3,500 babies safely at home. During that time, however, three babies died (two of them died 14 and seven months respectively, after their births, and the third death arose from shoulder dystocia complications at birth). Between four and seven babies die of shoulder dystocia complications in Hungarian hospitals each year, yet no hospital doctor has ever been prosecuted¹

On 26 April 2012 the AIMS Chair, Beverley Lawrence Beech, visited Dr Ágnes Geréb in her own home in Budapest, Hungary. When she arrived she was told that the Government of Hungary had extended Agnes' house arrest for a further period. The house arrest conditions are draconian. She is not allowed to leave her small flat, even to go downstairs to the garden, and she cannot go shopping or enjoy the sunshine. The police check up on Agnes four times a day at random times. They arrived while Beverley was there and rang the doorbell, when Dr Geréb answered it, the policeman silently handed her a paper, she signed it, and without a word he marched off. A year ago Hungary passed legislation to legalise home birth and this year, Felicia Vincze, became the first midwife to get a licence. This good news, however, does not affect Dr Geréb's case, because her case was started before the legislation was established, and the Hungarian Criminal Justice System appears intent to continue their persecution of Dr Geréb. They have three other, equally unjustifiable childbirth cases against her in the pipeline. Their determination to stop her practising appears to have no bounds.

On 24 March 2011 Dr Geréb was convicted of the criminal charges brought against her : she appealed. On 10 February 2012, the Budapest Appeal Court announced its verdict. Her original sentence was for two years' imprisonment and a requirement to serve half of it, together with a suspension from practice for five years. At the Appeal the two year sentence was upheld, but the time to be served was increased to sixteen months, and the Court's previous ban on Dr Geréb practicing midwifery and medicine was raised from five to ten years. It is a surprising, unnecessarily severe sentence, and in many observers' view, completely unjust.

Dr. Ágnes Geréb is an internationally renowned obstetrician-midwife who was the first in Hungary to encourage fathers into the labour ward. She assisted several thousand normal births without complications and her statistics are far better when compared with those that have been obtained from

Hungarian hospitals (though unfortunately, Hungarian hospitals are not required to reveal their statistics, so obtaining data is difficult). Four other midwives were also charged in the criminal courts, three of the four were found not guilty (their cases involved minor blood loss in the woman) and the fourth midwife was found guilty and given a hefty fine.

Midwife-led care in out of hospital settings for healthy women and babies, and midwifery support for all women have been shown to increase the normal birth rate, and to have beneficial health impacts. But the criminal proceedings against Dr. Geréb and other midwives are having an extremely chilling effect on the establishment of normal, community based, midwifery care in Hungary. If you have not signed the petition to the President of Hungary appealing for clemency, please do so:

www.change.org/petitions/please-grant-full-clemency-todr-midwife-agnes-gereb.

If you would like to hear Agnes talking about her experience, you can see a short film about her on vimeo.com/fogelmedia/a-21st-century-midwifecultural-creatives

Donal Kerry

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References

1. Kerry D (2011) Hungarian State Injustice, AIMS Journal, Vol 23, No3, p11-12.