AIMS For a better birth...

How to get a water birth

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Bending over backwards and jumping through hoops is difficult, especially when you're pregnant. Yet, for many women, this is just the sort of emotional and physical dexterity needed to achieve a water labour or birth. Prompted by the 'water-birth checklist' used by midwives in Lorne and Islands DGH, Oban, Fiona Campbell Smith provides a little light relief for those whose bureaucratic stamina is running out.

Dear Supervisor,

Thank you for sending the three-page application form for use of the birthing pool. You'll see I'm interested in several positions and I hope I will meet your entry requirements. I totally understand that in order to be considered for using the pool, I must be in excellent health and provide evidence from a fortune-teller showing I'm not likely to develop any problems during the birth. You may be pleased to know that, according to your criteria, my face does fit.

I'm not sure if I want to just labour in the water or proceed to water birth, and I'd be very grateful if you would allow me more time to consider this question. Would it be too late to let you know at my 36-week interview?

Whatever my decision, I do appreciate that most of the midwives will ask me to get out anyway. After all, the pool has only been there for three years and how on earth can midwives be expected to allow a water birth when they don't have the necessary experience.

It must be exhausting trying to explain to women that they can't have a water birth because there isn't enough demand, especially if it's one of those NCT types.

In the likely event of the midwife telling me to leave the pool, I will attempt to get out straightaway. I am, however, greatly reassured to know that if I can't manage to move myself, the midwife will be good enough to pull out the plug, thereby ensuring the safety of my baby.

I'm more than happy to give birth shivering in an uncertain depth of water, if that's what's best. It must be very difficult to maintain skills like 'plug- pulling' when there is so little demand for the pool, and I am most impressed that you can offer this service in such an isolated area.

It says on the application form that difficulty in observing the perineum is a potential safety hazard of birthing in water, and it would be thoroughly unreasonable of me to expect every midwife to have training in the use of a torch and mirror. To make things easier for the midwives, I've booked a weekend workshop in pole dancing. The dance tutor has assured me that, by Sunday afternoon, I'll be able to

exhibit my perineum in any position you can think of.

I know I can't be allowed to stay in the pool to deliver the placenta, but you needn't worry about that on my behalf. Assuming I do have a water birth, I will be out of the water before you can say Michel Odent. I'm not taking any chances, theoretical or not, of getting a water embolism. I must remember to ask you at my next interview about air embolisms, but I assume they can't be life- threatening or you would surely have mentioned it when I had my last baby on a bed.

I'm willing to take the increased risk of infection. Your water supply is clean and I will disinfectant myself at the first sign of labour. Maybe you could examine me frequently, using your infection-free gloves, just to make sure? Thank goodness for the curtain hiding the pool - that must surely reduce the amount of dust it collects.

You asked for a reference from my consultant and I believe Dr No will be in touch with you soon. I hope you won't mind that I've provided further references, too-one from Madame Clearblue, clairvoyant to the pregnant, and one from the Director of the School of Dance, Mrs Perry Neum-Inurface.

Finally, here is my tiebreaker answer to the search for a water-birth anthem, sung to the tune of the Hokey Cokey:

We put the woman in and we take the woman out,
Make sure she's on the bed while we get the baby out,
We are Okay Cokey 'cause the babe's not drowned,
And that's what it's all about.
Oh, we are Okay Cokey,
Oh, we are Okay Cokey,
Oh, we are Okay Cokey,
Legs up, bum down-push, push push!

Yours faithfully,
Mrs Fanny MacPerfect

References

1. Supervisor of Midwives Checklist for the Use of the Birthing Pool, as Used in Lorne and Islands DGH, Oban
2. What women tell me