

CHOICE, CONTROL & CONTINUITY

Informed decision-making for maternity care

Joy Johnston

Choice

Every woman needs midwifery care at the time of giving birth. The choices you make about the type of maternity care you will receive are very important.

A midwife can act either as a sole primary carer, or within a maternity service staffed by midwives, doctors, and other professionals.

In choosing the type of care, and options within that care, you can seek information from many sources. A midwife will provide some of this information, and support your decision-making processes.

The word midwife means, literally, 'with woman'.

The care that is provided by a known midwife is focused on the woman, with her own individual needs, beliefs, and preferences. The health and wellbeing of mother and baby are the primary concern of the midwife.

If you plan to give birth in hospital you may achieve a degree of continuity in your care by engaging the services of a midwife in private practice. That midwife can come to your home when you are in labour, and go with you to hospital. Once at the hospital, the midwife may be restricted by hospital policies, and her role may be referred to as that of a 'support person', unless she has been able to enter into an access agreement with the hospital. Check with a midwife what options are available.

A well woman who experiences spontaneous onset of labour at term, and progresses in labour without requiring drugs or other medical interventions may consider giving birth at home, in the care of her known midwife.

If you are planning homebirth you may need to change this plan and go to hospital for any reason. Your midwife will continue to provide professional midwifery services in hospital, even though other midwives and doctors will be allocated by the hospital to lead the care.

Midwives who are experienced in homebirth are able to attend birth in any setting. After a birth at home your midwife provides ongoing care and support in the early postnatal period, arranges for routine blood screening, referral to maternal and child health services, registration of the birth, and other postnatal provisions as required.

Control

In pregnancy and birthing you are able to be in control of your own life. This means seeking advice and care that is appropriate for your own needs, whether it is to do with maternity care, exercise, changes in employment, or anything else.

Your midwife will advise you on maternity care. She is accountable for her actions and recommendations. You are not obliged to accept advice given by your midwife or any other health care practitioner.

Since women began having babies their carers in birth have been midwives, the guardians of each society's next generation.

Remember that pregnancy and birth are not an illness. Your body tells you that change and growth are following nature's course. The cessation of your menstrual flow; the desire for good food and rest; the enlargement of your breasts—all external—accompany the private dreaming.

Your midwife is committed to supporting you and your family through this wonderful basic life event—the birth of your baby—your personal, intimate celebration of life and health.

Continuity

When being attended by a known midwife, you will recognize the voice and touch of that midwife, and understands her philosophy of practice. The confidence and trust that can develop between a woman and her midwife is very important, especially as labour progresses, and you know that you need to move into the often demanding and intense period of labour prior to the birth. The attention provided by a known midwife, whose focus is on you as an individual, may prevent confusion and fragmentation of care.

Continuity of care by a known midwife is not offered by most maternity services, which are structured around the provision of medical and nursing services for sick people. Most hospital maternity units provide midwifery care by allocating staff to care for the women in the unit at the beginning of each shift. This means that it is rare for a woman giving birth in hospital to be attended by a known midwife.

Independently practising midwives offer personal continuity of care, and limit the number of clients booked so that we can provide a personal service.

If you choose to have a midwife as your primary carer, you should book your midwife early in your pregnancy. The ongoing contact between you and your midwife allows you to develop a relationship based on knowledge of each other and trust.

Joy Johnston

Midwife and Lactation Consultant

in Blackburn South, Victoria Tel: 03 9808 9614

joy@aitex.com.au www.aitex.com.au/joy.htm

These words from ancient times are as powerful today as they have ever been.

You are a midwife.

You are assisting at someone else's birth.

Do good without show or fuss.

Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening.

If you must, take the lead.

Lead so that the mother is helped, yet still free and in charge.

When the babe is born the mother will rightly say:

“We did it ourselves”.

Attributed to Tao Te Ching, about 2000 years ago

For more information about midwives in your area, contact **Midwives in Private Practice**

03 9689 0255 (Victoria)

Or **The Maternity Coalition** (national)

inquiries@maternitycoalition.org.au

www.maternitycoalition.org.au