

CHOICE of BIRTH SETTING

Position Paper

ISSUE: There has arisen a recent movement by some members of the medical community to outlaw planned home births. 1-2% of all US births take place at home. This statistic has remained stable over the past few decades.

BACKGROUND: Although the number of home births in the United States is small, in many European countries large percentages of babies are born safely outside hospitals. The Netherlands, where up to 40% of all births occur at home, has the lowest percentage of mortality and morbidity in the world.

In Britain, the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists declares that “There is no reason why home births should not be offered to women at low risk of complications and, it may confer considerable benefits to them and their families.”

In a recent study in the British Medical Journal comparing planned home birth to hospital births, it was found that in North America, babies were born at home just as safely as in the hospital. The British National Health Service believes there is no “evidence to support the assertion that homebirths is a less safer option for women experiencing uncomplicated pregnancies.”

The Governing Council of the American Public Health Association (APHA) recommends that a woman’s informed choice of birth at home must be respected and appropriate home birth maternity services be made available.

A 2008 Cochrane Database review of ‘Home vs Hospital Births’ concluded that there was no strong evidence to favor planned hospital birth vs planned home birth for low-risk pregnant women. “Planned hospital birth may even increase unnecessary interventions and complications without any benefit for low-risk women”. In the United States “50% of all labors are induced, an ever-increasing number of births are through major surgery and there is a recent epidemic of late pre-term births.

POLICY: The National Perinatal Association (NPA) believes that planned home birth should be attended by a qualified practitioner within a system that provides a smooth and rapid transition to hospital if necessary. Safety for all births must be evaluated through an objective risk assessment, especially for non hospital births. NPA supports and respects families’ right to an informed choice of their birth setting.

STRATEGY:

- Support and respect families’ choice of birth settings
- Provide education and information regarding the option of out of hospital birth

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Toll Free: 888-971-3295
Website: www.nationalperinatal.org Email:

| npa1@nationalperinatal.org

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PERINATAL
ASSOCIATION** 

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| npa1@nationalperinatal.org

