

28 August 2011

Dear Commission,

I am currently practising as a Maternal and Child health Nurse in the city of Bayside and have done so for the past 8 years. Prior to this I worked in the field of Midwifery for 10 years at St. Vincent's Private Hospital.

My submission is concerned with Chapter 12 of the Early Childhood Development Draft Report, and the Child Health Workforce. My area of concern is the recommendation in 12.3 of the draft report regarding the removal of Midwifery as a qualification prerequisite for Maternal and Child Health Nurses.

Midwifery is vital to our practice as Maternal and Child health Nurses. Each woman has a unique journey through her perinatal period. The knowledge and information our midwifery qualification gives allows the Maternal and Child health Nurse an understanding of the women's body, both mentally and physically.

A Midwifery qualification allows Maternal and Child Health Nurses to understand why mothers may not be at their optimal health post delivery. Understanding antenatal care and the delivery process, especially if has been a traumatic delivery which has resulted in a Post Partum Haemorrhage, possible bowel or urinary or sexual dysfunctional, can have a huge impact on the post natal management of the mother and child. Maternal and Child Health Nurses can advise and act as advocate for mothers on how to seek further help. They also support these women in their recovery.

Mothers being discharged as early as 24 hrs post delivery need Maternal and Child Health Nurses to have a Midwifery Qualification to manage the postnatal period which is noted to cover a period of 6 weeks. Taking away this knowledge base will reduce health outcomes for all Victorian families.

Beyond Blue recognises the perinatal period as one of the most stressful times in a woman's life. It is noted in Beyond Blue Material that 1 in 3 people will have a mental illness. Having Midwifery qualifications and the ongoing relationship with mothers enables Maternal and Child health Nurses to follow up on Mental Health Care Plans. Each time a women visits a Maternal and Child Health centre the visit is not just about her child, it is also about her. Having to manage questions as to why a woman cannot understand why she does not like or feel connected to her baby requires a Maternal Child Health Nurse to have previous skills and experience in the management of these women during the antenatal / postnatal period in a midwifery environment.

Maternal and Child Health is now engaged with implementing health outcomes for mothers and babies through SIDS, QUIT and Domestic Violence. The Victorian Government acknowledges that Maternal and Child Health reaches over a minimum of 5000 mothers per year with these health messages. The issue of Domestic Violence affects 1 in 5 women in Victoria. Domestic violence is unfortunately a part of our society. Mothers will often confide/disclose such issues to the Maternal and Child Health Nurse for support. Maternal and Child Health Nurses need to bring to their practice optimal people skills to deal with such confronting issues by having General and Midwifery qualifications.

Prior to commencing Midwifery I was qualified as a General Nurse from St. John of God Hospital Ballarat and transferred to St Vincent's Public hospital for a graduate programme. General nursing gave a young nurse a fantastic knowledge base of all the systems of the human body. In my personal practice as Maternal and Child Health Nurse for the past 13 years this knowledge has been imparted into the management and following up on women with hypertension issues, urinary and bowels issues, immune disorders, skin conditions, wound management, mental health disorders, blood disorders ,gynaecological disorders and breast care. Dealing with grief and loss was learnt on the wards of hospital floors.

No true professional learns their skills through one qualification. For example, a cardiac surgeon is not a profession that a student leaving high school can go through by direct entry. A number of qualifications have to be achieved before this can occur. Maternal and Child health nurses need their General and Midwifery qualifications to service our communities to secure great outcomes for all Australian families.

I appreciate your time in considering this submission.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary LoSchiavo