



Media Statement from the Midwifery Council, 11 June 2010

The Midwifery Council extends its sympathy to the Barlow family and acknowledges their grief around the loss of their son Adam.

The Council's regulatory role is to ensure that all midwives are competent and safe to practise.

Chairperson Dr Sally Pairman says the Midwifery Council does not think it appropriate to comment in any detail on the individual circumstances of this case which is being investigated by the Coroner and the Health and Disability Commissioner. The Council noted however that when the midwife attending Mrs Barlow's labour recognised there was a problem she appropriately transferred her client to secondary services who managed the care from that point on.

As the regulatory authority the Council has already taken action in relation to both of the midwives involved. The recently graduated midwife is undergoing the process of a practice review. Mrs Barlow's original midwife came to the attention of the Council last year and immediate steps were taken by the Council to withdraw her right to practise because of health issues. She has undergone a rigorous process and in all the circumstances is fit to practise with closely monitored conditions.

In relation to the wider issues highlighted in the media, when the reports of the investigations by the Coroner and the HDC are made public the Midwifery Council will consider any conclusions and recommendations insofar as they relate to midwives and the maternity system.

The Midwifery First Year of Practice programme began in 2007 and provides mentoring and support for new graduate midwives. Although participation is voluntary around 98% of graduates enrol in the programme. While the case involving the Barlow family has focused attention on new graduate midwives, Council has no evidence to support concerns about the competence of this group. Council deals with complaints about a small number of midwives and, in five years, only three of those have been about a new graduate midwife. In that time some 540 have graduated from a New Zealand midwifery programme.

The Midwifery Council is concerned once again that media coverage is focusing on one aspect of tragic stories of this nature before the results of investigations have been made public. This is counterproductive both to improving care by health professionals and to consumers' understanding of

the maternity system. It also acts to undermine public confidence in New Zealand's high quality maternity system where healthy mothers and babies is the focus, women's choice is advocated and good outcomes compare with, if not exceed, those countries against which we are benchmarked.

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