

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, 23 February 2006

BTA - Charging for epidurals will leave vulnerable at risk

The Birth Trauma Association were dismayed to hear the proposal from the Education and Research Committee of the Royal College of Midwives that women having babies in NHS hospitals should pay for epidurals unless there is a medical need. BTA representative Maureen Treadwell said "There is a real risk that being denied adequate pain relief in labour will lead to incredible suffering and subsequent mental health problems. This is especially true of the most vulnerable women like those who have suffered abuse or previous physical pain. If the RCM wishes to debate the issue of epidurals at their conference we would like them to consider the following questions:

1. In what other field of medicine do we deny pain relief to a suffering human being purely on the grounds of cost?
2. There is concern at government level about the falling birth-rate: what impact does the RCM think its statement will have on those women contemplating childbirth, particularly those from less well-off backgrounds?
3. Why does the RCM's Education and Research Committee want to limit the availability of epidurals? Is it truly on the grounds of cost? And if so, is it the role of the RCM to act as the government's accounts controller? Surely their role is to support midwives to deliver evidence-based care and to support women in childbirth?
4. Is the RCM aware of the potential damage to the mother's long-term mental health if denied adequate pain relief?

The real debate here is about what sort of birth experience we think women should have. The BTA believes that ultimately it has to be the woman's choice and that no-one, not even the most experienced midwife or obstetrician, has the right to impose on her their own personal view.

'The woman who is reasonably satisfied with her birth experience, whether it includes epidurals or not, is the woman who will get the best possible start to motherhood, for the benefit of both her own long-term mental and physical health, and for that of her child.'

The BTA would be more than happy to meet with the RCM to discuss this matter further."

Notes to Editors:

The purpose of the BTA is to work for the prevention of birth trauma and to support women suffering from it. We promote the welfare and interests of women with Post Natal Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and of all women traumatised by childbirth. We are mothers helping other mothers and working to establish respect for basic human dignity as a cornerstone of maternity care. This is most effectively achieved by providing quality information to women to enable them to be free to make their own informed choices about childbirth (this includes pain relief, C/S etc). The BTA believes that on receipt of the best information available, it is then the woman's right to choose how she wishes to give birth and that this decision should be respected wherever clinically possible and should be criticised by none.