

Women can and should make the decisions about where they give birth, says human rights in childbirth charity Birthrights

Commenting on reports that the NHS England-commissioned National Maternity Review may recommend that women are given maternity vouchers to enable them to choose their care-providers, co-chair of Birthrights Rebecca Schiller said:

“women should already be able to make decisions about how, where and with whom they give birth. This is not about giving them a new right but simply respecting a woman’s basic human dignity at a time when she is vulnerable.

It is clear from medical guidance (such as the NICE Intrapartum guidelines), many policy documents and importantly evidence about what women want during childbirth that respecting them and ensuring they are in control is crucial to safe and positive birth.

The recent UK Supreme Court decision in the case of *Montgomery v. Lanarkshire Health Board* made it clear that women should be the ones making the choices in childbirth and that they must be supported to do so with in-depth discussion with their midwives or doctors. The court also asserted that women should have access to the best evidence - personalised to them - should they want or need it.

However many midwives and doctors today are working in a system that doesn’t give them time to form relationships with women or discuss evidence and options in a meaningful way. This needs to change urgently.

For many women in 2015 there simply are no options. Worryingly some NHS Trusts have policies that instruct blanket refusal of maternal-request caesarean sections. In other areas homebirth services have been withdrawn for long periods of time and no birth centres are available. The National Maternity Review needs to address this.

With that mind we look forward to hearing more about any proposal that seeks to tackle these systemic issues, treat women respectfully, listen to them and ensure they can really access the care they decide is best for them and their babies.

Providing safe care is intrinsically linked to listening to women and ensuring their needs are met. We need to trust that women, with support, are best placed to decide what they need. Designing a system that puts women at the centre and allows midwives and doctors real time to care for them would be a huge step towards safe, quality and respectful care.

ENDS

For further information please email press@birthrights.org.uk or call 07793084945

We can provide spokespeople.

Notes to Editors

You can read more about *Montgomery v. Lanarkshire Health Board* here: <http://www.birthrights.org.uk/2015/03/uk-supreme-court-upholds-womens-autonomy-in-childbirth-montgomery-v-lanarkshire-health->



board/

Birthrights is the UK's only organisation dedicated to improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality. We aspire to advance the human rights and law-ful treatment of all child-bearing women.

What we do:

- Provide free, accurate and accessible legal information and advice on human rights and the law relating to childbearing women.
- Campaign on respect for women's rights in childbirth as fundamental human rights that maternity-service providers are legally obliged to respect and fulfil.
- Offer advice, assistance and training to caregivers, professional or otherwise.

Birthrights promotes women's right to receive evidence-based care that conforms to the best medical and midwifery standards. We do not hold views on clinical issues arising in maternity care.

Birthrights is a charitable incorporated organisation. Our registered charity number is 1151152.

You can read more about our work on our [website](#) and read our press coverage [here](#).

