

27 June 2018

Media Release

Spurious and baseless attack on maternity services in private hospitals

Suggestions by a Queensland Health bureaucrat that mothers choosing to give birth in private hospitals were at greater risk than those who choose the public system were spurious and totally without any basis in fact.

The President of the National Association of Specialist Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (NASOG), Dr Stephen Lane, said so erroneous were the comments by Queensland Health's maternity head Rebecca Kimble that even the Deputy Director-General of Queensland Health was moved to caution against making such comments.

"Dr John Wakefield warned against 'anybody saying one is safer than the other (public or private) because we don't have the evidence of that'," Dr Lane said.

"Also, to suggest that mothers should emulate a princess who lives in a palace and left the hospital six hours after giving birth beggars belief.

"Not everyone has a household of staff to go home to as was the case with the princess but this fact seems to have escaped Dr Kimble.

"Mothers should stay in hospitals as long as is necessary for their health and safety and the private system provides this environment.

"To suggest otherwise is dangerous and irresponsible. For a health professional her comments are very disappointing and quite inappropriate."

Dr Lane said a study entitled *Perinatal mortality disparities between public care and private obstetrician-led care: a propensity score analysis* concluded that: "Babies born in Australian public hospitals tend to die more often than those born in private hospitals."

The study went on to say: "Our findings suggest that private obstetrician-led care has a beneficial impact on perinatal deaths, despite, or possibly because of, higher obstetric intervention rates and earlier births in the private hospital."¹

Dr Lane said the evidence therefore clearly refuted Dr Kimble's misinformed comments.

"I would have expected more from a health professional and she has used, and indeed abused, her official position to put forward a view that is offensive to all doctors, nurses, midwives, anaesthetists and private hospital staff.

"The care provided by obstetricians and gynaecologists in private hospitals is second to none."

Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) CEO Mr Michael Roff said mothers giving birth in the private hospital sector had excellent perinatal and maternal outcomes, and the high-quality service provision that the private system is known for.

"To suggest otherwise is quite simply wrong and these statements are disturbing for their factual inaccuracies and their potential to cause confusion," Mr Roff said.

"Private hospitals play a crucial role in the provision of health services throughout Australia and are a critical element of the health care system across a range of health care, including maternity services. We should value that, not undermine it."

For all Media Inquiries, please contact NASOG CEO Caroline Khalil on 0400 101 109.

¹ Adams N, Tudehope D, Gibbons K, Flenady V. Perinatal mortality disparities between public care and private obstetrician-led care: a propensity score analysis. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*. 2017;125(2):149–58.