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# Birthing centres gaining acceptance in Australia

By INGE SUNDSTRUP

The use of birthing centres as a viable alternative to hospital maternity wards is gaining acceptance around Australia, much to the delight of Sister Cecily Harmey.

Sr Harmey, a founding member of the Launceston Birthcentre Inc, believes that birthing centres can offer a relaxed, home-like delivery within close reach of the latest medical technology and medical equipment.

She has just returned from a Family Birth Centres Seminar in Melbourne last weekend and is fired up with enthusiasm and plans for the Launceston centre.

The seminar attracted about 150 people involved with birthing centres around Australia for talks, lectures and tours of local birthing centres.

"The best part of the seminar was seeing so many obstetricians and midwives with a positive attitude towards birthing centres," Sr Harmey said.

"I think birthing centres are at last becoming accepted as a viable alternative to the hospital."

During the visit, Sr Harmey and the other delegates attended lectures by doctors from three birthing centres in Melbourne.

Two of the centres — the Royal Women's Hospital and the Queen Victoria Medical Centre — operate as part of the hospital system although they are a separate from maternity wards.

They are staffed separately from the labor ward and are self-contained units within the hospital.

The third centre — the Hawthorn Birth Centre — is a purpose-built independent birthing centre.

"As well as seeing the birthing centres, we also visited a normal hospital labor room and it was interesting to see the comparison," Sr Harmey said.

The Launceston Birthcentre opened in July, 1983, in a two-bedroom flat on the ground floor of the nurses' home at the Queen Victoria Hospital.



● The Launceston Birth Centre's Sister Cecily Harmey with her son Jonathan, 3½.

"We cater for a minority group of couples who don't want to use the QVH, which is the only maternity hospital in Launceston," Sr Harmey said.

"The parents take over the flat as their home for the labor, birth and up to 24 hours after delivery.

"The latest medical equipment and technology is close by in case of an emergency."

To date there have been 22 births at the centre — four have been transferred to the QVH and 18 were normal births.

"The mother can choose her own doctor and registered midwife for the birthing," Sr Harmey said.

"No hospital staff are involved, although all doctors are registered at the QVH in case of a last-minute emergency transfer."

Before a mother can use the birth centre, she must attend counselling sessions to ensure she is a suitable candidate.

Appointments and further information about the centre is available on (003) 27 2881.