

## Reflection of Health Practitioner Disciplinary Tribunal (HPDT) – Priscilla Ford

16 February, 2024

Reflections on attending the last day of midwife Priscilla Ford's case with the HPD at Akerama marae north of Whangarei.

Firstly thank you to the membership of Aku Huia Kaimanawa Midwives' Collective for your generosity in paying for my airfares to be there. Thank you to the good people of Akerama marae and proclaimed hapu Hoani Haora Hoani for your gracious hospitality. Thank you to Bette Ras who looked after me so well.

I had hoped to be able to address the 3 midwives who were paid to sit on the HPDT and to bring a perspective based on my herstory of being a founding member of NZCOM and of 43 years of prior extensive midwifery practice in NZ. I had hoped to say that what the Midwifery Council (MC) is doing by bringing charges against Priscilla Ford of malpractice and professional misconduct, is in fact a major confusion on their part.

There was clearly no doubt that Priscilla has always demonstrated confident midwifery competence throughout all of her work as a midwife. Her midwifery competence is not the issue here. I wanted to ask the older midwives who have been working with the HPDT for years if they could acknowledge that this case was like no other in their experience. There was no fraud here. There was no midwifery action or omission of any midwifery action that caused harm to any mother or baby. There was no complaint from any mother or family about the midwifery care that they received from Priscilla.

This is all about the informed decision making to decline receiving an experimental gene biotechnology by Priscilla (along with some hundreds of other NZ midwives). This is all about prioritising bodily autonomy and responsibility to the women who were in Priscilla's care over compliance with the illegal mandate imposed by the MC as outlined in the COVID - 19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendment Order (No 3) 2021.

This has nothing to do with midwifery competency.

The MC's claim that any midwife who held onto their right to bodily autonomy and to decline a medical procedure was therefore "unfit to practice" and "a danger to public health" is the travesty here. The outrage here is that the very body that is meant to be ensuring safe and available midwifery services in NZ is in fact the very organisation that is blocking these good midwives from getting back into practice and alleviating the acute shortage of midwives in NZ. These PCCs and hearings in the HPDT are wasting taxpayers' money. These punitive actions by the MC are bringing the midwifery profession into further disrepute, disarray and dysfunction.

I was only able to attend the last day of the hearing and after the formal process was concluded I was given a seat and invited to speak. The midwives of the HPDT left the room as I began to speak. Nevertheless it was an honour to be able to address Priscilla and her family, her remarkable law support team and her community with a message of affirmation and gratitude for everything they have done. I feel profound sadness, dismay and disbelief to be seeing this phenomenon in our NZ maternity system. I extend respect to Priscilla, her

husband and her family for their dignity and graciousness in the midst of this distressing madness.

I am in no doubt that the MC, NZ's midwifery regulatory body, appears to have lost its ability for discernment and to uphold its primary responsibility to the childbearing population of NZ by ensuring the sustainability of a healthy functional midwifery workforce.

Going forward, our hope for a healthy women centred midwifery system rests, as always, with women and their whanau joining with courageous midwives to safeguard each other and to work together with love and confidence in childbirth.

Yours in midwifery

Anne (Sharplin).