



# International Confederation of Midwives

**PRESS RELEASE**

**April 18, 2002**

## **‘Take normal birth off the list of endangered species!’**

Dr Beate Schücking, a physician and psychotherapist, presented to midwives at the 26<sup>th</sup> Triennial Congress of the International Confederation of Midwives an analysis of ‘the impact of giving birth on women’s health’. She emphasised the opposing aspects of the birth experience – the power it can bring; and the vulnerability. Midwives can play a significant role in protecting the woman’s self-determination and channelling the power.

Beate continued by exploring the various effects of childbirth on women: the injuries and damage from the birth; the anxieties and emotional impact; and the lasting physical changes. She described the current situation in the German region of Lower Saxony, where the Caesarean section rate is 24.1%, and 47.6% of women giving birth vaginally undergo an episiotomy. The level of induction is around 18% of all women. However, no benefits to health have been linked with these high intervention rates: the rate of perinatal mortality remains the same, and women’s satisfaction is poor.

Among the effects on women’s health are:

- Postnatal pain
- Postoperative infection – after Caesarean section
- Sexual difficulties – especially after episiotomy
- Depression in pregnancy and postnatally
- Pelvic floor problems – often from operative vaginal delivery
- Increased risk of vascular disease
- Dysfunctions of the immune system, which can be triggered by childbirth

Breastfeeding brings benefits including reduced risk of breast cancer, but obstetric interventions tend to lower breastfeeding rates. Other good news for women who have had children - a lower risk of breast cancer, heart disease, smoking-related problems and stress.

Finally Dr Schücking called for further research into long-term effects: a multinational, prospective study over at least 20 years. Thus the joy and power – and the lasting effects – of giving birth will be shown to science.

Meanwhile, it is clear that over-use of obstetric intervention is not helpful - we must take normal birth off the list of endangered species!

The ICM is a Confederation of 83 national midwifery associations from 70 countries, founded in 1919. Its mission is to ‘advance world-wide the aims and aspirations of midwives in the attainment of improved outcomes for women in their childbearing years, their newborn and their families wherever they reside’.

Major international congresses are held every three years. The 26<sup>th</sup> Congress currently taking place in Vienna, Austria, includes over 750 presentations. Keynote speeches are given by leading midwives from every region of the world.

*For further information contact ICM headquarters or visit the website [www.internationalmidwives.org](http://www.internationalmidwives.org)*