



CIMS
COALITION FOR IMPROVING
MATERNITY SERVICES

1500 Sunday Drive, Suite 102
Raleigh, NC 27607

Tel: 919-863-9482
Fax: 919-787-4916

www.motherfriendly.org

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Dear Producers of *The Today Show*,

The Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS) and the undersigned organizations are disappointed with *The Today Show*'s misrepresentation of midwives and home birth that aired on Sept. 11, in a segment titled "[The Perils of Midwifery](#)," later changed to "The Perils of Home Birth." This biased and sensational segment inaccurately implied that hospitals are the safest place to give birth even for low-risk women and mischaracterized women who choose a home birth with a midwife as "hedonistic," going so far as to suggest that these women are putting their birth experiences above the safety of their babies. Neither could be further from the truth.

Unfortunately, *The Today Show* did not do its homework on the evidence regarding the [safety of home birth](#) and [midwifery care](#). The segment featured an obstetrician who presented only the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) position in opposition to [home birth](#), but it did not make any attempt to present the different viewpoints held by [the many organizations](#) that are committed to improving the quality of maternity care in the US. We are deeply saddened that the show did not take the opportunity to note that both CIMS and The National Perinatal Association respect the rights of women to choose [home births](#) and [midwifery care](#), and that the respected [Cochrane Collaboration](#) recommends midwifery care because it results in excellent outcomes.

There is no evidence to support the ACOG position that hospital birth for low-risk women is safer than giving birth with midwives at home. What the research *does* show is that the [routine use of medical interventions](#) in childbirth without medical necessity can cause more harm than good, while also inflating the cost of childbirth. However, the current health system design offers little incentive for physicians and hospitals to improve access to [maternity care practices](#) that have been proven to maximize maternal and infant health.

"Birth is safest when midwives and doctors work together respectfully, communicate well, and when a transfer from home to hospital is needed, it is appropriately handled," says Ruth Wilf, CNM, PhD, a member of the CIMS Leadership Team.

That is why the national health services of countries such as Britain, Ireland, Canada, and the Netherlands support home birth. In those countries, midwives are respected and integrated into the maternity care system. They work collaboratively with physicians in or out of the hospital, and they are not the target of modern day witch hunts. These countries have [better outcomes](#) for mothers and babies than the US.

Childbirth is the leading reason for admission to US hospitals, and hospitalization is the most costly health care component. Combined hospital charges for birthing women and newborns (\$75,187,000,000 in 2004) far exceed charges for any other condition. In 2004, fully 27% of hospital charges to Medicaid and 16% of charges to private insurance were for birthing women and newborns, the most expensive conditions for both payers. The burden on public budgets, taxpayers and employers is considerable.

Making Mother-Friendly Care A Reality

CIMS is a not-for-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). Our mission is to promote a wellness model of maternity care that will improve birth outcomes and substantially reduce costs.

As [US birth outcomes continue to worsen](#), it should come as no surprise to *The Today Show* that childbearing women are seeking alternatives to standard maternity care. After all, American women and babies are paying the highest price of all—their health—for these unnecessary interventions, which include increasing rates of [elective inductions of labor](#) and [cesarean sections without medical indication](#).

To the detriment of childbearing families, the segment “The Perils of Midwifery” totally disregarded the evidence. Although the reporters acknowledged that research shows home birth for low-risk women is safe, that message was overshadowed by many negative messages, leaving viewers with a biased perception of midwifery care and home birth. CIMS makes these points not to promote the interests of any particular profession, but rather to raise a strong voice in support of maternity care practices that promote the health and well-being of mothers and babies.

One of the ten [Institute of Medicine](#) recommendations for improving health care is to provide consumers with evidence-based information in order to help them make informed decisions. The Institute recommends that decisions be made by consumers, not solely by health care providers. The Institute maintains that transparency and true choice are essential to improving health care. We remain hopeful that the medical community will soon recognize [the rights of childbearing women](#) when it comes to their choices in childbirth and will respect and support these choices in the interest of the best possible continuity and coordination of care for all.

We urge *The Today Show* to provide childbearing women with fair and accurate coverage of this important issue by giving equal time to midwives, public health professionals, researchers of evidence-based maternity care, and especially to parents who have made choices about different models of care and places of birth.

Sincerely,

Coalition for Improving Maternity Services
Academy of Certified Birth Educators
Alaska Birth Network
Alaska Family Health and Birth Center
American Association of Birth Centers
American College of Community Midwives
American College of Nurse-Midwives
Bay Area Birth Information
Birth Network of Santa Cruz County
Birth Works International
Birthing From Within, LLC
BirthNet
BirthNetwork National
BirthNetwork of Idaho Falls
BirthNetwork of NW Arkansas
Choices in Childbirth
Citizens for Midwifery

DONA International
Douglas Association of Southern California
Evansville BirthNetwork
Harmony Birth & Family
Idaho Midwifery Council
Idahoans for Midwives
InJoy Birth and Parenting Education
International Childbirth Education Association
International MotherBaby Childbirth Organization
Island Families of Micronesia
Lamaze International
Madison Birth Center
Midwives Alliance of North America
Motherbaby International Film Festival
Nashville BirthNetwork
National Association of Certified Professional Midwives
North American Registry of Midwives
Ohana Island Care-Guam
Oklahoma BirthNetwork
Our Bodies Ourselves
Perinatal Education Associates, Inc.
Reading Birth & Women's Center
Rochester Area Birth Network
Sage Femme
The Big Push for Midwives Campaign
The Tatia Oden French Memorial Foundation
Triangle Birth Network
Truckee Meadows BirthNetwork

About Us

The Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS) is a coalition of individuals and national organizations with concern for the care and wellbeing of mothers, babies, and families. Our mission is to promote a wellness model of maternity care that will improve birth outcomes and substantially reduce costs. The CIMS Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative is an evidence-based mother-, baby-, and family-friendly model of care which focuses on prevention and wellness as the alternatives to high-cost screening, diagnosis, and treatment programs.

References:

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