



Maternity service fails to deliver

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Health Reporter

Maternity services in northern Sydney are again in disarray with the sudden axing of the maternity services at Manly Hospital just two months after a midwife program was shelved, affecting up to 200 women.

Some expectant mothers have been affected by both closures, forcing them to scramble twice during pregnancy to find another place to give birth.

The *Herald* was told two other hospitals in the area – Royal North Shore and Mona Vale – were overwhelmed by the demand created by the Manly service closure.

Angela Gosling was told on Thursday that after nine months of antenatal care at Manly Hospital she would have to find somewhere else to give birth to her first child, due this Friday.

“There was no forewarning – the midwives were as shocked as we were,” she said. “To be told this news with one week until my due date is truly devastating.”

Mrs Gosling and her husband, Matt, were notified by letter by the hospital about the closure. She described the letter as “par-

ticularly poor” – it contained no apology and was short on both detail and compassion.

One of 90 women affected, she will now give birth at Mona Vale Hospital, but has been told she is to be transferred back to Manly Hospital four hours after having her baby.

“Giving birth to a child is arguably the most monumental experience a woman will go through and for everything they have prepared for to suddenly change, particularly at a stage when they could give birth at any time, is extremely distressing,” she said.

Midwives said it was outrageous that the area health service simply closed down the maternity unit when an obstetrics registrar position could not be filled, rather than revamping it as a midwife-led service that would have allowed women to continue to give birth there.

“There are other ways to deal with this – there are options rather than the complete axing of the service,” said Hannah Dahlen, the secretary of the NSW Society of Midwives. “If we ran a health service that was women-centred and consumer-driven we would find a way to deal with this.”

When the Northern Beaches Health Service abandoned its midwife project in September at Manly and Mona Vale hospitals, which was to have involved 100 women at each facility, it gave less than 48 hours’ notice.

The Manly maternity service was closed at equally short notice, Ms Dahlen said.

“There are quite a few women who were affected by firstly the closure of the midwifery services, then by the Manly closure.”

An area health service spokeswoman said difficulties in recruiting an obstetrics registrar had prompted the suspension of maternity services at Manly Hospital. A doctor was recruited overseas in September but for personal reasons was unable to take up the position, she said.

A locum registrar would start work at the hospital on January 23 while the hunt for a permanent replacement continued. “In the meantime, because patient safety is paramount, Manly maternity unit began a partial suspension of services from [yesterday],” she said.

The hospital would continue to provide antenatal clinics, postnatal admissions and booked gynaecological surgery.