

Women's health at risk

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WOMEN'S loss of faith in evidence-based medicine could start shortening their lives, one of the state's top medical specialists says.

University of Adelaide Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Alastair MacLennan says women's health has improved dramatically in the past two centuries, but it may have peaked and could start to decline.

He will deliver the biannual Arthur Wilson Oration this weekend, and his main message is that scientific best practice is starting to be ignored by many women in favour of alternative therapies or more interventionist procedures such as caesareans, leading to the "danger of a possible downturn of women's health in the near future".

He adds that delayed pregnancies

and the obesity epidemic also could play a part in the "descent of woman".

He argues that women have evolved rapidly through safer, fewer childbirths along with improved sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and medicine, with their life expectancy increasing by decades.

But now they are leaving motherhood very late and obstetricians and midwives are being driven out of their profession through litigation.

"The escalating and controversial caesarean section rates of over 30 per cent and the closure of maternity hospitals reflects the pressure of litigation and defensive obstetrics," he said.

"I (also) suggest women's health is vulnerable to going backwards as we have no effective laws in Australia to control the false claims of

the ineffective and sometimes dangerous alternative medicine industry.

"Sixty per cent of women buy alternative medicines and 30 per cent attend alternative practitioners.

"Alternative medicines are replacing evidence-based therapies for infertility, menstrual dysfunction, menopause and even in obstetrics. It is time for the alternative medicine industry to be brought to task," he said.

Professor MacLennan will deliver his oration, *The Ascent of Woman from Queen Adelaide to Queen Camilla*, on Sunday at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 2010 Annual Scientific Meeting.