

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Ms Claire Handleman

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Partially
Confidential

I recently gave birth at _____ hospital and had a very upsetting experience. The team didn't try to accommodate my birthing preferences and in the end committed obstetrical violence.

I attempted a home birth, but after 36 hours of labour I wanted pain relief and asked for a walking epidural. I was informed that _____ doesn't do these kind of epidurals. So I then asked if I would be allowed to be assisted into different positions (if I had a regular epidural) when it came time to push. I was told 'yes'.

In fact, when the time came, I was told that it would be dangerous to try to attempt different positions. I was told that there were too many cords (I had an IV and a catheter). I was told that handing me my baby through my legs would be too difficult.

It was disheartening to learn that the team wasn't willing to assist me in more advantageous positions and I was instead relegated to pushing in a sitting, upright position. All of these rebuttals were just excuses and my requests were nothing out of the ordinary.

As frustrating as that was, my big complaint is this.

The midwife noted that my baby's heart rate was dropping after each contraction, so the doctors came in with a vacuum.

The doctor looked at me and said she was going to give me an episiotomy.

I told her very directly that I did not want an episiotomy and I would prefer to see if my body could handle the birth. And if I was going to tear, I preferred to tear naturally.

As you know, research now shows that it's much easier healing if the body tears naturally, vs a cut.

At this time, my private midwife also repeated my request to the doctor, declining an episiotomy.

Instead of being listened to, the doctor went ahead and gave me one anyway.

I'm shocked that I wasn't given the opportunity to let my body try to birth my baby, unharmed by the doctor. The baby was descending well and only needed the vacuum on my last push, where I was informed the vacuum did "5% of the work." My baby was born with an apgar of 9 and 9.

The rush to give me an episiotomy, especially against my will, was unnecessary and very emotionally upsetting.

I would hope that a woman's request, especially when pertaining to her bodily autonomy, be listened to. We were not in a life or death situation and I should have been given the opportunity to try to birth my baby with the vacuum before being cut.