

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 24 July 2023

Partially
Confidential

My Name is _____ and I would like to contribute to the parliamentary enquiry into child birth trauma.

I have 2 children born 2012 and 2014 respectively. On both occasions I required re-admission to hospital with pregnancy and birth complications.

In 2012 my daughter was born at _____ Health Service. Weighing only 2.48kg at full term, my daughter had an undetected “true knot” in her umbilical cord. She was low birth weight. She was a Vacuum extraction baby. 14 days after birth, we were re-admitted to _____ Health Service with my daughter being “slow to thrive”. I had struggled to breast feed and my daughter was starving, losing any residual fat stores she had. The pressure I experienced to breastfeed was immense, and I felt a great sense of failure as a mother. It was an emotional and challenging time of my life. Once my daughter commenced formula feeding, she slowly began to thrive.

In 2014 I delivered a baby boy at _____ Health Service. 6 days after delivery, I suffered a Post-Partum Haemorrhage at home. I attended _____ Health Service and needed subsequent transfer to Hospital. I required 2.5 litres of blood via transfusion. I had an infection in my uterus. During the 12 hours I spent at _____ Health Service, I thought I was going to die. I was literally bleeding out overnight. At Hospital I was given treatment to assist clotting to stop the bleeding. I was transferred from _____ to _____ via Ambulance. Once I returned home, my uterus remained “bulky” and took a number of months to reduce down in size. I had muscle separation and required physio to assist in strengthening my muscles. I was given Iron tablets and it took a long physical recovery. I was tired all the time, sleeping regularly and still had 2 children to attend to. At 5 weeks post-partum I got Influenza. My immune system was struggling, and I was again very sick.

Both of these events left me with PTSD and post-natal depression/anxiety. I did not seek help until mid 2015 when I was crying all the time and having flashbacks from the post-partum haemorrhage event. I approached a trusted GP and I received counselling through a Medicare funded mental healthcare plan. I still feel great shame that I was not able to cope with these experiences and that I needed help. I’ve never told anyone besides my husband that I needed help. It was the most isolating time of my life.

I have no malice towards my care team during these events. My Doctor was highly skilled and very experienced and the health teams did all they could to make sure I was safe and healthy. Both _____ and _____ Health Services were professional and supportive.

I would like to advocate for change and better mental health care services for all mothers’ post-birth. I would recommend that all mothers have access to either NSW Health Psychology Services as a priority client for the first 12 months post-birth or Medicare funded psychology services for the first 12 months post-birth. I believe access to mental health care and early intervention is crucial to support all mothers after birth. I’d also love to see a psychology services partner with maternal infant health programs in the first instance for all new mothers. This could involve both psychology and nursing services completing joint home visits in the first 6 weeks, not just nursing services. I believe had I have had access to counselling supports from the beginning my after care experience would be different.

I also think the “fed is best” message needs to be given to all new mothers. The pressure on new mothers to breastfeed and the sense of failure this brings when it doesn’t work out is immense and demoralising. A “fed and healthy” baby is the most important thing.

Pre-birth planning and explanation of birth related complications needs to be provided in the gestation period or through mid-wife services. I felt that I was uneducated about complications, and no one wants to talk about what happens when it goes wrong. I found myself googling months after these events to obtain research and understanding to what happened to me. Had I been educated prior to birth, perhaps these events would not have been so traumatic for me.

My trauma happened 9 years ago. While now a distant memory, when I think or talk about what happened I do become emotional and distressed. For the most part, it’s pushed to the back of my thoughts. It was meant to be the happiest time of your life, instead it was stressful and awful. My reflections of my post-birth experiences are distressing not those of happiness.

I hope through this submission I can help other new mothers. I hope I can help advocate for change and better post-birth mental health care services.

Thank you for this opportunity and allowing me to tell my story.

Regards