

Submission  
No 101

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially  
Confidential

I'm 35 years old and have 3 children, 5 yo, 3yo and 1yo.

I consider all of my births traumatic.

My first labour, of my 5yo daughter, occurred in a private hospital. I had continuity of care with a male OBGYN. Now that I have given birth 3 times, I realise how important continuity of care is. I believe each pregnant mother should receive continuity of care with a female midwife, having the same midwife for her entire pregnancy and follow up care.

I feel that the antenatal classes provided to my husband and I were vastly (almost ridiculously) lacking. Although they explained the physical progression of labour, I don't feel they remotely prepared us for being in actual labour. The midwives at the private hospital were absolutely amazing, but I feel that my labour cause have been immeasurably better if my husband and I had been better prepared/taught about labour. I was admitted to hospital, at 3cm dilated, because I have high blood pressure. My husband and I had no idea what we were meant to be doing. After a while, I walked out of the hospital room and asked the midwives what I was meant to be doing in the room. I didn't understand that I was being left to labour & progress.

When I was moved tot he labour room, I still had no idea what was happening, what my options were. I was just laying on a bed, labouring. I didn't understand that I could have gotten in the bath, bounced on a ball etc. I was lost and scared and in pain.

After +30hrs of labour, I asked for an epidural after a midwife suggested it to me. I wish the effects of the epidural were better explained to me, in that I couldn't move from the bed, had to give birth on my back, the flow on of interventions. The baby got stuck and I was advised she needed to be pulled out. I asked whats the best option for the baby ad was told forceps. Thankfully I had had the epidural because I then received an episiotomy, with no warning or explanation, to my anus. I wasn't rolled onto my side, to open my birth canal, I wasn't given any other options besides needing to pull her out. I am left with a prolapsed uterus, colon and bladder because of the use of the forceps.

I was able to stay in the hospital for 5 days, which was a godsend for my breastfeeding journey, having round the clock access to trained midwives.

Once I left the hospital, the aftercare was non-existent. I returned to the hospital 6 weeks later for the routine check up (where I told my OBGYN that I believed I had a prolapse). He told me there was nothing that could be done and, when Id finished having babies, he would preform surgery and lift everything back up. On my own instincts, I found an amazing womens health physio, who has helped me immensely to receive some of the life affecting symptoms of having such extreme prolapses.

My second birth, I had my 3yo son in a public hospital. I was under the care of a midwife program and the continuity of care was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The midwife came to my house for each appointment, which was amazing. Less stressful, I was so much calmer and more comfortable. I developed a relationship with my midwife, and student midwife. It felt a lot more like what birth should be, natural, less clinical and women's business. In the end, I thought my waters had broken (but they hadn't) and after 24hrs I had to birth in the hospital and not part of the midwife program. Thank god that my student midwife could attend and I had the continuity of care. I was calling her name, not my husbands, during my labour.

Unfortunately this labour was even worse than my first, with my 5.7kg baby also getting stuck (shoulder dystocia). The emergency button was hit and the room filled with people. The midwife did explain to me that there was a problem. I trusted the medical staff implicitly. It all happened in matter of seconds. People were holding my legs up, pushing on my belly, reaching inside of me to corkscrew my baby out. He was briefly laid on my stomach, while I begged for them to delay his cord clamping, which wasn't possible as he required resuscitation. I laid on the bed, watching (what I thought) was my dead son being resuscitated. A lovely midwife was standing next to my husband, explaining what was happening. I was in a blur. They rushed my son to the special care unit. I recall yelling to my husband "don't leave him, don't let anyone take him" (I didn't know the special care unit was literally across the hallway). I was so lost and confused. I didn't see my baby for about 6 hours because I had lost so much blood and was so dizzy.

We both stayed in the hospital for several days.

I was asked to return to the hospital 6 weeks later, to have a debrief. Unfortunately the OBGYN who was there during my birth (who had corkscrewed my son out) was away and I had a sit in OBGYN. I don't understand the point of this "debrief" as there was no debriefing. I was read the steps that happened during the birth, from the birth log. What I needed, was a debrief with a counsellor, who could help me understand and vocalise the questions that I still have today. The incredibly rushed "debrief" left me with more questions than I had when I went in. I was given a script for the mini pill and left the hospital. I still am confused and unsure what happened to my baby and I when I gave birth to him.

My 3rd and final labour:

I didn't get into the midwife program, due to my last birth. The appointments at Hospital were pretty horrendous. I asked for a student midwife because I knew that I needed that continuity of care. The appointments at Hospital were rushed, brief, abrupt and I felt like a number. I felt the hospital was understaffed. I found the OBGYNs were abrupt and rushed. I actually asked for a new OBGYN because the one that I routinely saw (although I saw many) told me what was going to happen to me, told me how it would go, told me instead of guided and informed me. I was given the most basic information and was almost shunned for asking questions or for more information. Lucky it was my 3rd baby, I would have hated that experience if it were my first. The lack of continuity of care was atrocious. The lack of after care was atrocious. The lack of breastfeeding support = atrocious.

one of the many OBGYNs that I saw made me feel like I was not important and an idiot when I told him some of my birth choices (if a c-section was required, I wanted to smudge the baby so the baby gets the bacteria from me for its biome. He told me that wasn't possible, as they sanitised my vagina during a c-section. I was adamant and he scoffed and laughed at me.

I was in labour all night (contractions every 10 minutes) and was exhausted. Because of this, I was slightly pressure to be induced, even though I was in active labour. My water had been broken for 24hrs, which I believe was also the reason I was pushed towards an epidural. The care was fantastic, although the constant monitoring of the baby, with the monitor attached

to my stomach, really inhibited my labour. If this could be removed and have checkins every few minutes, that would be a lot better than the constant monitor being strapped to you as mine kept falling off and my student midwife had to manually hold it on, which was horrible when you're trying to labour.

My son also got stuck, lucky I knew what was about to happen, so I rolled with the steps. The one thing that did stand out to me (haunts me) was watching my son receiving CPR, on his unmoving, almost black body. I was rushed to surgery as my placenta wouldn't detach and had to be manually removed. My son was taken to the special care unit (SCU). After the surgery, I was wheeled on my bed into the SCU to see my son. It wasn't until the next day or 2, that a paediatrician was checking my son that I asked him if he could go through what happened to him/us. For 2 days I didn't know what had happened.

I went to the "debrief" 6 weeks later as well. Same as last time, not really a debrief, but more of a checklist tick off. Given a script for the mini pill. I told the OBGYN that I felt like I needed to talk to someone about my birth trauma, he told me to go to my GP. I have never followed up on this as I feel it's too hard and don't want to make a big deal. I wish help was more readily available and free. I still think about my last 2 births and cry.

This is the briefest of summaries and I'm only describing the points which I think relate to what hospitals can do to change. There are many, many, many more stories of my labours which contributed to my birth trauma, which I haven't mentioned.

I believe there should be much, much more after care for women and babies. I believe a midwife or nurse should come to your house in the days and weeks after you return home. I believe there should be free access to International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC), who come to your house. There is little to no breastfeeding education or support (no wonder our breastfeeding rates are so low). I believe the after care should last for months after giving birth, even just a phone call from your midwife each day to check in.

My greatest suggestion is that labour and birth have become so medicalised that labour is now a negative health condition. Labour should not be medicalised and should be much more natural and relaxed. Continuity of care should be the bare minimum, and finally, breastfeeding information classes before birth as well as much, much more free and easily accessible breastfeeding support.