

Submission
No 147

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I experienced physical birth trauma after the birth of my second baby in 2020. I knew something wasn't right a couple of weeks after the birth but despite talking to the midwives and going to my GP a couple of times describing my symptoms and having a physical examination I was reassured that everything was normal for having had babies. It wasn't until I went to see a women's health physio at 3 months postpartum that I was finally diagnosed with prolapse and a potential avulsion. The advice I received was awful - I was told to not do too much in one day - for example, do the shopping and then come home and have a lie down. I was told to avoid carrying my babies and to avoid lifting anything heavy. It made me extremely anxious and worried about doing anything for fear of worsening this injury which was physically so uncomfortable. I could barely stand to make dinner or do basic chores without pain - extreme heaviness from the prolapse, feeling like my abs were non-existent and uncomfortable and terrible aches from the weakness in my core and pelvic floor. I am now almost three years postpartum and still feel the physical discomfort from this injury.

There was no education during either of my pregnancies regarding pelvic floor injuries and none of the midwives asked about symptoms of prolapse or pelvic floor injury after my births. The GP after both births did not mention prolapse at all and even told me I didn't have prolapse after I specifically asked her to check for it.

Once diagnosed there has been no real sense of support despite this being a very common birth injury. To manage prolapse conservatively still costs quite a bit of money with physio costs as well as buying support items like pessaries and prolapse support shorts and leggings. I explored the surgical options through the public hospital and was shocked and upset when the male gynaecologist casually offered a hysterectomy with no compassion or empathy whatsoever. He also didn't seem to be aware that surgeries are more likely to fail if you have an avulsion. To get surgery privately is so expensive.

It would be wonderful to see birth injury talked about more openly, both during and after pregnancy and also in general considering it affects around 50% of women at some stage during their lives. It would also be wonderful to make seeing a women's health physio a normal and Medicare covered part of having a baby. The six week check for women after having had a baby is terrible. It does not assess any potential injuries or damage to women's pelvic floors so this check up really should just be for the baby and a six week check up be done by a women's health physio instead.

I think there is a lot we can do to work towards more open discussion and education about birth trauma and then to fully support women affected by birth trauma to heal.