

Submission
No 203

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 2 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I gave birth at the

My waters broke naturally at home on a Saturday afternoon. My contractions came on thick and fast, I had very little breaks, a few seconds each time. We headed to the hospital pretty quickly. I laboured OK without medication for a few hours, but after about 4 hours I was at 7cm and just didn't think I could make it all the way, so I had an epidural. Everything carried on progressing, I was fully dilated by about 10pm, but they said to wait for an hour or two before pushing. At midnight I started pushing. I couldn't feel a thing thanks to the epidural, but it also meant I had zero urge to push, no pressure, I couldn't feel if I was pushing hard or not. I asked if I could move around at all, on to my side, but the midwife said I was not allowed to move because I had the epidural. After 2 hours I was exhausted and the baby's heart rate started dropping. The doctor came in and very matter of fact said - you can have forceps or vacuum but this baby needs to come right now. She said I had to have an episiotomy which I tried to resist but she said I didn't have a choice. They used the vacuum and it took her 4 really hard pulls to get the baby out (I mean so hard she used her entire body weight). they put the baby on my chest, her head was a big open wound covered in blood and I then started saying to my partner you need to take the baby off me, I'm not ok, I am going to faint.

Suddenly there were a lot of people in the room as I had started hemorrhaging blood. They put an oxygen mask on me, and started giving me medication, which made me start vomiting. Things started stabilising and I remember the midwife telling my boyfriend to take his shirt off to do skin to skin. I felt like I wasn't really there, we didn't know the sex until the baby was born but I don't think I was aware that I had just had a girl. I stabilised and everyone left. I couldn't hold the baby though. I just lay there. I couldn't feed her as I couldn't sit up, so my partner left to go and get the colostrum. It was just me and the midwife for an hour or so. After about 1.5 hours the midwife went to change the pads on me and just burst into tears, she opened the door and shouted "please someone help me, I can't look after her anymore, she's still bleeding". I thought I was dying. A doctor came in, they weighed some things, talked and then I was taken to surgery about 30 minutes later. I had been bleeding out for a few hours at this point. I had no idea what surgery, what they were going to do, I had no idea where the baby was, all someone said to me was "you've lost more blood than we'd like". My partner came back and said goodbye to me as I was going under general, we both thought I was dying - so I told him to look after the baby.

I woke up to the ventilator being pulled out my throat, in a different ward, a different part of the hospital. I lay in recovery for an hour or so and was then taken to acute recovery. I had a lot of blood transfusions so my whole body was swelling up from all the fluids, I had wires and tubes everywhere. I felt like I had been hit by a truck. I stayed in acute recovery for a few days. At one point a social worker came to see me and said I could ask for the nurse changeover to be done outside so I didn't have to hear the words "major blood loss" every few hours - this helped. They told me the baby could come and see me (she has gone to NICU because of the open wound across her head although no one had told me this) but I asked not to have her there. At the time, I just wanted everyone to leave me alone. I certainly didn't feel like I had had a baby. After 2 days, I met my baby girl, and I started to feel better, I stood up for the first time in days, and after another day they transferred us down to postnatal. The midwife had

told me I wouldn't be able to breastfeed, but I gave it a go and it started working. We were discharged a week after I had gone to hospital. I want to say that I had great care but I don't think I did. I understand that problems happen and it doesn't always go to plan, but I didn't feel communicated to, I had no control, I was not empowered in any way, if anything they seemed to exacerbate the trauma (at one point a junior doctor told me they had no idea why I bled so much and it could happen again at any moment - this was not true).

I then had one check on the baby at home a week later and that was it, no check in on me, no check in on my baby's head (subgaleal haematoma can be extremely serious). I still had no idea what had happened, what surgery I had had, and why it had all gone wrong. To this day my daughter has a crescent shaped scar across the top of her head. I remember feeling like my organs were going to fall out on my first walk out of the house but I presumed this was normal. I also had wet myself a few times, and again I just assumed it was normal. At my 6 week check my GP said prolapse to me, and I immediately panicked and saw a pelvic floor physio. She was my saving grace. I sat with her and cried, scared about what had happened and the future. She told me to ask for a hospital debrief, and started working with me to recover and strengthen my pelvic floor. She took me seriously.

I didn't go to any mother's groups. I stayed inside struggling with everything. If I am honest, I had some very dark moments in which I wished I had rang a helpline or done something, but I was scared of being judged. I had no family to support me and my partner was back at work for 12 hours a day.

I had a hospital debrief at 12 weeks pp. They apologised for what happened, apologised that I had bled out so much without anyone realising or taking me to theatre. They explained that I had lost 3.5L of blood, 2 in the birth and another 1.5 in the hour after the birth, and that the surgery was to remove the piece of my placenta that had stayed inside me, and put a balloon in there to stop the bleeding.

My postpartum experience was rough. I felt broken. I struggled to bond with my baby, as I was so interfered with. I was overweight but scared to work out because of the prolapse. I was scared of my own body and completely exhausted. I was so angry at the doctors who had put my life and my baby's life at risk, that had permanently damaged both of us. At about 10 months PP I still wasn't coping with the trauma and I got a referral for some therapy which helped, she explained how PTSD works and gave me some coping mechanisms working through how I felt and the fact it was not my fault, I also got a referral for pelvic floor therapy on the public system so that it didn't cost me as much (I spent thousands between GP appointments, physio appointments, therapy appointments). I lost a lot of weight, and went back to work, and created some normalcy back in my life.

It's been a really long road back to becoming me again. I have never had to deal with something like this and I don't know anyone else who has had traumatic births like this. If you are a healthcare professional reading this, over communicate with your patients, tell them

what is happening, why it is happening and give women the right to make decisions for themselves, listen to them, check in on them. I don't know if that will ever go I gave birth at the

My waters broke naturally at home on a Saturday afternoon. My contractions came on thick and fast, I had very little breaks, a few seconds each time. We headed to the hospital pretty quickly. When I arrived, I was made to feel like we had come too early (even though my contractions were a minute or so apart) and when I asked for paracetamol a midwife said to me "it's supposed to hurt". I laboured OK without medication for a few hours, but after about 4 hours I was at 7cm and just didn't think I could make it all the way, so I had an epidural. Everything carried on progressing, I was fully dilated by about 10pm, but they said to wait for an hour or two before pushing. At midnight I started pushing. I couldn't feel a thing thanks to the epidural, but it also meant I had zero urge to push, no pressure, I couldn't feel if I was pushing hard or not. I asked if I could move around at all, on to my side, but the midwife said I was not allowed to move because I had the epidural. After 2 hours I was exhausted and the baby's heart rate started dropping. The doctor came in and very matter of fact said - you can have forceps or vacuum but this baby needs to come right now. She said I had to have an episiotomy which I tried to resist (I had been using the epi-no) but she said I didn't have a choice. They used the vacuum and it took her 4 really hard pulls to get the baby out (I mean so hard she used her entire body weight). they put the baby on my chest, her head was a big open wound covered in blood and I then started saying to my partner you need to take the baby off me, I'm not ok, I am going to faint.

Suddenly there were a lot of people in the room as I had started hemorrhaging blood. They put an oxygen mask on me, and started giving me medication, which made me start vomiting. Things started stabilising and I remember the midwife telling my boyfriend to take his shirt off to do skin to skin. I felt like I wasn't really there, we didn't know the sex until the baby was born but I don't think I was aware that I had just had a girl. I stabilised and everyone left. I couldn't hold the baby though. I just lay there. I couldn't feed her as I couldn't sit up, so my partner left to go and get the colostrum. It was just me and the midwife for an hour or so. After about 1.5 hours the midwife went to change the pads on me and just burst into tears, she opened the door and shouted "please someone help me, I can't look after her anymore, she's still bleeding". I thought I was dying. A doctor came in, they weighed some things, talked and then I was taken to surgery. I had no idea what surgery, I had no idea where the baby was, all someone said to me was "you've lost more blood than we'd like". My partner came back and said goodbye to me as I was going under general, we both thought I was dying - so I told him to look after the baby.

I woke up to the ventilator being pulled out my throat, in a different ward, a different part of the hospital. I lay in recovery for an hour or so and was then taken to acute recovery. I had a lot of blood transfusions so my whole body was swelling up from all the fluids, I had wires and tubes everywhere. I felt like I had been hit by a truck. I stayed in acute recovery for a few days. At one point a social worker came to see me and said I could ask for the nurse changeover to be done outside so I didn't have to hear the words "major blood loss" every few hours - this helped. They told me the baby could come and see me (she has gone to NICU because of the

open wound across her head although no one had told me this) but I asked not to have her there. At the time, I just wanted everyone to leave me alone, my whole body was swollen bruised, I had needles in every hand and arm, I was so sore from the episiotomy, and losing that much blood I was exhausted. I certainly didn't feel like I had had a baby. After 2 days, I met my baby girl, and I started to feel better, I stood up for the first time in days, and after another day they transferred us down to postnatal. The midwife had told me I wouldn't be able to breastfeed, but I gave it a go and it started working. We were discharged a week after I had gone to hospital. I want to say that I had great care but I don't think I did. I understand that problems happen and it doesn't always go to plan, but I didn't feel communicated to, I had no control, I was not empowered in any way, if anything they seemed to exacerbate the trauma (at one point a junior doctor told me they had no idea why I bled so much and it could happen again at any moment - this was not true).

I then had one check on the baby at home a week later and that was it, no check in on me, no check in on my baby's head (subgaleal haematoma can be extremely serious). I still had no idea what had happened, what surgery I had had, and why it had all gone wrong. To this day my daughter has a crescent shaped scar across the top of her head. I remember feeling like my organs were going to fall out on my first walk out of the house but I presumed this was normal. I also had wet myself a few times, and again I just assumed it was normal. At my 6 week check my GP said prolapse to me, and I immediately panicked and saw a pelvic floor physio. She was my saving grace. I sat with her and cried, scared about what had happened and the future. She told me to ask for a hospital debrief, and started working with me to recover and strengthen my pelvic floor. She took me seriously.

I didn't go to any mother's groups. I stayed inside struggling with everything. If I am honest, I had some very dark moments in which I wished I had rang a helpline or done something, but I was scared of being judged. I had no family to support me and my partner was back at work for 12 hours a day.

I had a hospital debrief at 12 weeks pp. They apologised for what happened, apologised that I had bled out so much without anyone realising or taking me to theatre. They explained that I had lost 3.5L of blood, 2 in the birth and another 1.5 in the hour after the birth, and that the surgery was to remove the piece of my placenta that had stayed inside me, and put a balloon in there to stop the bleeding.

My postpartum experience was rough. I felt broken. I struggled to bond with my baby, as I was so interfered with. I was overweight but scared to work out because of the prolapse. I was scared of my own body and completely exhausted. I was so angry at the doctors who had put my life and my baby's life at risk, that had permanently damaged both of us. At about 10 months PP I still wasn't coping with the trauma and I got a referral for some therapy which helped, she explained how PTSD works and gave me some coping mechanisms working through how I felt and the fact it was not my fault, I also got a referral for pelvic floor therapy on the public system so that it didn't cost me as much. I lost a lot of weight, and went back to work, and created some normalcy back in my life.

It's been a really long road back to becoming me again. I have never had to deal with something like this and I don't know anyone else who has had traumatic births like this. If you are a healthcare professional reading this, over communicate with your patients, tell them what is happening, why it is happening and give women the right to make decisions for themselves, listen to them, check in on them.