

Submission
No 216

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

In 2019 I was expecting my first child and had been living overseas but returned to Australia thinking it would be safer and a better experience than birthing in Nigeria.

Unfortunately my husband wasn't able to come as we didn't receive his visa on time so I stayed with my mum in [redacted] and as there is no birthing unit there we had to travel to [redacted] hospital to birth. Upon arrival to the hospital after starting early labour I was unable to have cervical exams and was diagnosed the next day with vaginismus by the OB on duty (I was unaware of this until later).

This same OB attempted to do a cervical exam and was unsuccessful so he tried again but this time gave me gas and air and had 2 nurses hold my legs open as he tried to shove his hand inside to check me. I was in tears and shaking and when he was unable to complete the exam he sent us into town to walk around and get contractions a bit more consistent. I left feeling like I had just been assaulted in a room full of people, a nurse was tasked with holding open one of my legs hung around to apologise and ask if I was ok, my sister and mum were both in tears just watching this assault take place.

After walking around we returned to the hospital and saw the OB again who told me he would have the nurses call for an epidural and once that was in they could try again and give medication to progress the labour as I was past 40 weeks.

He left the room and a nurse came in maybe 5 minutes later and told me to go home, they don't give epidurals to people not in labour. There was then a lot of conflict back and forth between my support people and the nurses trying to seek clarification on why the OB said one thing and they were saying something else. To which we were told the OB was a locum and he doesn't know how things are done in that hospital.

The OB had left for the day so the head nurse then said she would put us in a room for the night and monitor. The next morning when the OB came back he was furious the nurses had not listened to him and called for the anesthetist himself and the Epi was finally administered. He also gave us details of who to report the nurses to.

After our beautiful baby was gone it was requested the next day my mum bring her down the hall to have her hearing tested and when she did that the nurse pulled her aside and told her of my diagnosis of vaginismus. I had still not been told of this diagnosis of vaginismus but my mother now had been and asked if my husband had possibly been assaulting me to cause this. My mum said no that my husband seemed like a great guy but she (who has a history of abuse with my dad) told them she suspected my dad assaulted me as a baby and he was coming to visit that day.

I had always had a great relationship with my dad and no memories of him assaulting me physically or sexually so this was a shock that that was now what we were talking about.

But the nurses decided to run with that. I was told I had to leave the hospital then before he came to meet the baby or they would need to report me to CPS for putting my newborn baby at risk. So we were quick discharged.

- how is being held down by medical staff acceptable?
- How is telling anyone but me of MY diagnosis acceptable?
- How can medical staff create scenarios and threaten a new mum with CPS before they even had a chance to parent?

My 2nd birth in 2021 I had the pleasure of seeing a fantastic clinical midwife at hospital who worked with me on how I could birth with this condition and gave me hope for a better birth. She wrote a birth plan and great detail on my condition.

The night I went into labour I stayed at home as long as possible, so I was definitely in active labour, I felt empowered and like I was in control. I arrived at the hospital around 2am and requested an epidural straight away as I didn't want to worry about being examined or if anything went wrong medical staff could do as they needed to and the Epi would make the stitches after bearable if needed.

The nurse said no problem let me examine you and I asked if she could read my notes, which she did and came back with the on call OB who said they read the notes and saw the plan from the clinical midwife but asked if I was willing to listen to them if I got the Epi and said the clinical midwife had some great ideas but they aren't always realistic, referring to a portion of the birth plan that said I was to breathe and not push as the baby would work her way out without force to try to minimise tearing and as my muscles already contract due to the vaginismus that maybe you didn't need a lot of pushing. I said yep happy to do whatever you need as long as baby is safe. To which the OB said ok, I just needed to make sure you were reasonable so yes we can get the Epi for you.

The nurse took us to the delivery room and got ready, placed the cannula and took bloods I kept asking how long until the Epi would be administered and she kept brushing it off. She must have got sick of me asking because she told me the bloods would take hours and even if they placed it right then it would be at least an hour before it worked so I calmed down.

Contractions were very intense at that point, the midwife wasn't giving any info on what was happening with the Epi and I started screaming during contractions, the midwife asked me to sit on the toilet as that might help HER be able to see the baby. I went to the toilet and found that position better, she didn't and asked me to go back to the bed, I told her it was better

for me there and she told me I couldn't deliver my baby on the toilet and when I asked why she said " cause your baby will die" and laughed at me.

Hours passed and no epidural, the baby was crowning and she told me I needed to push, all I could do was cry and scream and pain. I was waiting on an epidural that was never coming with no communication from hospital staff as to why or what was happening. The midwife did however have time to tell me to be quiet the yelling isn't helping.

Our 2nd beautiful baby girl was born 4 hours later and I was just in complete shock as to what I had just been through again. It's all a blur, if there was any sort of communication as to what was happening, like maybe I was too far along or offered other options for pain relief, suggestions on using the shower or birth ball or anything then maybe I could have flicked out of panic mode and birthed my baby in away that didn't leave me feeling ashamed of the noise I made or questions I asked.

It seems like the in duty staff didn't approve of the birthing plan and as they couldn't examine me that Epi was never going to come. After birth I asked the midwife if she was actually ever going to call for it as she just smiled and said " we were working on it ". I also sat naked in a pool of blood for hours after as I had to " wait for staff to assist " to the shower. Which turns out was just them saying I could go and shower seems small though on the scale of it all.

I'm writing this through tears and have questioned if I should even bother writing this, what difference will it actually make?

I'm 31 weeks pregnant with our 3rd baby girl and headed back into hospital in 9 weeks, just praying to get a midwife who wants to be at work, who will read the birth plan and support me and hopefully care about the well-being of patients but also questioning if I should give up on natural birth and opt for the C-section that has been offered by the hospital OB just to avoid further trauma inflicted by medical staff