

Submission
No 257

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Dear Committee,

I gave birth to my child this year and would like to share my experience.

I had a healthy pregnancy without complications and as such was a patient of a birth centre at a Sydney public hospital. My wish was for a vaginal birth without medical intervention. At my 39 week appointment I felt pressured to schedule an ultrasound and CTG scanning for 41 weeks, in case my pregnancy continued past my due date.

I attended hospital at 41 weeks for my appointments and was informed after my ultrasound that my placenta was no longer functioning at its prime, which I felt was to be expected. I then underwent CTG scanning, where the equipment was evidently faulty. While still seated in the chair and hooked up to machinery, I was immediately pressured by a succession of doctors to agree to be induced. A first doctor recommended induction, and I said I would like time to think about it. She walked away and immediately returned with a second doctor, where I was pressured to agree to receive prostaglandin. I asked about the risks associated with prostaglandin, and was not adequately informed. Instead, I was stood over, pressured, and I felt intimidated. I reiterated that I wanted time to consider, and to talk to my doula, who wasn't present at the time. I was then led into a small windowless room, where I was made to wait for 45 minutes for another doctor to see me. Again I was pressured, and when I asked for more information about why induction was being recommended and what the concerns regarding my pregnancy were, I received unclear, inconsistent advice, which also contradicted the advice offered by the previous doctors. I pleaded to be allowed to leave the hospital, to have some fresh air, food, time to think and to speak to my doula. At this stage I'd been at the hospital for four and a half hours. I was eventually asked to sign a form absolving the hospital of liability. This was the second time I had signed this form during this appointment. The doctor agreed to allow me to leave the hospital on the condition I return later that afternoon for more CTG monitoring, with a view to accepting the prostaglandin. I left the hospital feeling bullied, threatened, anxious, and highly distressed. Once I left, I was too upset to return to the hospital. I was not in a state to make an informed, clear-headed decision regarding the medical advice, and felt concerned I would continue to be pressured, threatened and intimidated, and effectively held on the premises against my will. The hospital continued to harass me, calling multiple times, up until 11pm that night.

Labour began naturally for me, though I had a prolonged, intermittent, three day early labour. Contractions began for me that night. I returned to the hospital for a standard birth centre appointment two days later, and agreed to more CTG monitoring. The results offered nothing of concern. I agreed to come back the next day for more monitoring, and at that next appointment, was told by a doctor that I was to stay in hospital until I gave birth. As I had been so harassed by the hospital, and was extremely anxious, I agreed.

I was hooked up to CTG monitoring for the entirety of my labour in the hospital. At no point did this indicate any foetal distress, anomaly or cause for concern.

When I was settled into a room, I was given a vaginal examination by the head doctor and told that my waters had already broken. She wanted to hook me up immediately to an antibiotic drip and initiate the induction process. This information proved to be incorrect and this course of action averted, only after my doula queried the information and requested a second opinion. My waters broke that evening. After I had been in overnight, with my labour progressing naturally, there was a change in midwives, where the new midwife instructed I push, as she said I had been there long enough. I didn't feel a physical urge to push, although I was 10cm dilated at this point. I did as I was instructed, and completely wore myself out physically, without my baby emerging. After this, I was subjected to multiple vaginal examinations, and I wasn't asked to consent to them. I felt vulnerable, exposed, violated and degraded by them. Eventually, after my labour failed to continue to progress, I was told for the very first time that my baby was in the posterior position and I needed to have a caesarean. I don't know why after so much medical scrutiny I hadn't been informed of this earlier, especially when I now understand my pattern of labour was consistent with this. I was not encouraged or supported by the midwife or doctors to continue with my labour, and I accepted the caesarean. In retrospect, I believe that with time, sound medical information and support, I could have achieved the natural birth I wanted. Instead, I felt as though I had to battle for the birth I wanted, and ultimately, I lost. I still feel deeply upset about my experience with the hospital, and I feel as though they robbed me of what should have been a very precious time in my life.

My baby was born by caesarean, with a very healthy birth length and weight. My baby's 1 and 5 minute Apgar scores were 9 and 9 respectively, which undermined the medical emergency the hospital had been suggesting was imminent for days.

I understand the hospital I gave birth at has a very high intervention rate, with few women achieving a non medicalised birth.

Kind regards.