

Submission
No 272

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had a very healthy pregnancy, low risk by all accounts.

At 40+3 weeks gestation on Friday 3rd December, after feeling like I was not having the big strong movements I was used to from baby during that afternoon, my partner and I went into Hospital ED. I was put on the monitor in the birthing suites. Soon after the midwives began the tracings I felt some big kicks from baby and they said that everything looked fine on the monitor. I immediately felt relieved. They continued a tracing for about half an hour and said they had no concerns. They also did an ultrasound to check for any amniotic fluid decrease and reported no issues there either. I was happy to be able to go home to await spontaneous labour.

Before we left a female doctor came in and spoke to us and suggested induction on Monday as I was over my due date. I mentioned that I thought due dates were rarely correct and that I was only just over by a few days. I told her that I was keen to wait until I naturally went into labour. Throughout the conversation this doctor used the term 'risk of still birth' multiple times and warned against leaving it too long before I was induced. I was surprised that she seemed so concerned and so felt scared that she knew something I did not. Was "still birth" more common than I thought? I immediately went from feeling excited about how close I was to meeting my baby and now felt scared at all the things that could go wrong in the process. I asked the doctor what she recommended and she said she would book in an induction in. I asked her if it had to be Monday and she said yes and explained that this was when there were enough staff on to start this process for me. I told her that meant that I only had the weekend left as a chance to spontaneously go into labour, she agreed and said she would schedule us in for Monday morning to have a baby. Little did we know that we would not have our baby until the Thursday and that the next three nights in hospital would cause me irreversible physical and mental damage.

This doctor pushed for us to book induction early by using fear tactics. She was cold and cruel, we felt uncomfortable and anxious. Considering the fear we both felt hearing about a risk of still birth after the conversation, we begrudgingly booked the induction. What if something bad happened to my baby and the hospital had warned me? I left feeling like I had this pressure to go into labour in the next two days and this fear that I wouldn't and would have to be induced. I felt like I didn't have an option. I spent the whole weekend researching induction and building anxiety about Monday, instead of enjoying the last few days I had alone with my partner and allowing my body to relax and do what it needed to. Oxytocin is key in stimulating labour, with the anxiety and fear created in me, my body had no chance.

If I could go back I would tell this doctor no, I would have trusted my own body to do what it can do on its own, and in its own time.

My birth was scheduled to occur when it suited the staffing levels in the hospital, not when my baby was ready to be born.

My partner and I came into Birthing Suites on Monday 6th December, at 8am in the morning and I felt incredibly anxious. I wasn't sure what to expect to happen to me physically and whether I would stay in the hospital from now until baby was born or whether I would be sent home to labour. I was hoping I would get to go home as I was already so uncomfortable and not sleeping well. We waited hours which built anxiety and nervous energy further. A Nurse came and spoke to us a few times apologising for the wait and noting how understaffed they were.

By the time we were taken into the labour consult rooms I felt teary due to the anxiety and unknown of what was to come. The Nurse had me lay down on the bed and again we waited for a long time. The Nurse finally returned and advised me that step one in the induction process was for them to insert a cervidil strip right up high in my vagina, sitting in my cervix. I think I expected this to be quite quick and painless, like inserting a tampon. The Nurse said it shouldn't be too uncomfortable. The Nurse said my cervix was really far back and so she struggled to reach it and it took time to get the cervidil into place. After multiple attempts I was crying from the pain. I felt stupid for crying when I was about to go through labour, but it was way more painful than I had expected. The Nurse left and my partner held me and let me cry. I was taken to my hospital room and told to wait until the next morning to see what progress could occur overnight. After getting settled into the room I asked a Nurse for something to take to help move my bowels as I had not done so since Sunday 5th December in the morning, the Nurse agreed but nurse stated 'it will be over quick anyway, no need to worry.' She did not return at any point with anything to assist me. My partner went home to sleep as we thought we would have a baby the next day and sleep would soon be hard to come by. I had a few minor cramping feelings overnight and had some paracetamol, I was able to get some broken sleep in between the Nurse checks.

The next morning Tuesday 7th December, my partner came into the Hospital and I was taken back to the labour rooms and the cervidil tape was removed. A Nurse attempted to check my cervix for dilation but seemed to really struggle. She was pushing hard and fumbling around inside me, similar to the Nurse the previous day. The entrance of my vagina was feeling bruised from fists hitting it with each push. I asked her to find someone with long fingers as it was really painful. Another Nurse was called to try and she again noted how hard the cervix was to reach, her fingers were no longer. Internally I just wanted to tell them to stop but I kept breathing through it. The Nurse finally told me that I was only 2cm dilated so it was now time to try to balloon catheter. The Nurses had explained this next process the previous day, so I had some idea what to expect. My main thoughts were that fingers would need to go inside me again to insert it and I was already feeling so bruised and sore. I was laying there readying myself for the next step but the Nurse told me this that would happen that afternoon, not now. I asked why this could not commence now as I was in hospital ready to have this baby and I had mentally prepared myself to go through the pain of the insertion again. They told me that they try to avoid babies being born at certain times of the day and night due to lower staffing. I told them I did not want to wait the whole day making no progress as I was already so anxious and not getting much sleep. They told me I would have to wait. I asked if I could go home, they said I could not. This was so frustrating, I could have been at home and my partner could have been at work. We sat in the Hospital room all day waiting.

I again asked for something to take to help move my bowels as I had not done so since Sunday morning, 2 coloxyl were given to me but they did not have any effect. I had stated previously how ineffective they had been throughout my pregnancy.

That afternoon we were taken to one of the birthing suites to have the balloon catheter inserted. This was incredibly painful. It felt so unnatural and the cramping pains were so strong. I gripped onto my partner and cried through it. The process took what felt like ages with more pushing and shoving into my bruised vagina. A female Doctor present raised her eyebrows and commented 'you should seriously consider your pain relief options for labour as you are not even coping with these routine procedures and inspections.' They made me feel like I was inept and already failing, unable to face what was ahead of me. I went to bed that night feeling depressed, defeated and scared. I slept on and off overnight in between the Nurse checks, I had minimal cramping but some bloody discharge overnight.

That day I had a conversation with a midwife saying that if/when my waters were broken I wanted to wait a period of time to see if labour started on it's own, prior to cyntocin being commenced. This was a decision I had reached after my personal research on the weekend. The midwife told me that I had better not change my mind about this when talking to the doctor as a lot of women do and then it looks like the midwives are telling the patients what to do. The midwife seemed anxious about this and reiterated to me a few times that I had to personally tell the doctor this, she would not. I laughed uncomfortably at this comment, unsure what the issue here was. It seemed to me that the doctors and midwives were not on the same team and would not be working together in my best interests but instead maybe with an agenda. I was expecting a team, a collaborating midwife and doctor for me and my baby. Was I now supposed to only trust specific people? Take sides? Why did this seem political? The midwife gave the impression that it was us against the doctor and that we would need to be tough and firm if we were to have our wishes adhered to. The doctor/midwife relationship became my issue and my stress when I was just communicating how I wanted my birth to go. The midwife seemed afraid to tell the doctor what approach I wanted and this is not the continuity of care anyone should experience.

The next morning, Wednesday 8th December, they removed the balloon catheter and again checked my dilation, noting that I was still 2cm. They told me my waters would have to be broken and cyntocin would need to be started. I noted that I had still not had a bowel movement and wanted to do so before I went into labour and gave birth. I was told it would happen and not to worry, by this point I was getting worried, it was playing on my mind how many days it had been and whether it would happen before, during or after birth.

Every time they had to do an internal examination, we would ask for someone with long fingers to do it. Each time whoever was about to do it would be positive that they could do it and insist they try. They would try, fail, hurt me and then have someone else try. No one would listen to me when I asked that I not have multiple people try. I felt scraped and scratched internally and bruised externally from their hands pushing against me as they each tried to get their fingers deeper. My partner also brought up several times that we would

prefer a doctor come and do the examination to minimise the trauma to me. Again I felt like a fool asking as I was not even in labour yet.

My waters were broken and as I had asked they gave me an hour to see if contractions would start naturally, unfortunately they did not. Cytocin was started and the contractions quickly began. Initially they turned up the dosage too quickly and my contractions were coming too fast. They had to turn the dose back down. They were painful but there was enough break in between that I was able to catch my breath, have a drink and prepare for the next one. I felt like I was coping quite well and was feeling proud of myself, so this was labour, I was doing it! I laboured for six hours with no pain relief and then my dilation was checked, I was at 4cm. They told me they would need to increase the cytocin as it was taking too long. They upped it and it was immediately so much more painful. I was not getting a break in between contractions and could not get comfortable no matter how I lay, knelt, stood or sat. As one contraction would begin to ease the next one would commence, it felt very unnatural and I began to hyperventilate, feeling like I could not catch my breathe. The Nurse offered me gas and air and I tried to use breathing in and out with it to calm myself. I remember the feeling like I was floating and seeing shapes and colours. I could hear what was being said around me distantly and muffled. I continued to take in the gas and air steadily as this dissociation from reality was the only thing keeping me going. I was exhausted and knew I couldn't keep going like this for much longer, so when my partner suggested an epidural I readily agreed.

While I waited for the epidural I continued on the gas and air, the midwife asked me to slow down but I didn't feel I could, I could not go back to feeling what I was. I remember the feeling of drifting in and out of consciousness, like I was falling asleep and then drifting back and hearing bits of conversation. I don't know how long it took but I remember a very tall man who they noted was a registrar coming into the room and trying to talk to me then setting up for the epidural. I felt really anxious about how much this might hurt and was trying not to think about the fact that he was about to insert a needle into my spine. I kept steadily taking the gas in, hoping I could again float away and not feel or remember this part.

The registrar prepped my back and then inserted the needle, he soon commented that he had put the wrong size needle in. He tried again and again and again, saying that he couldn't get the right spot. I remember feeling so anxious that he was not experienced enough and that I would be paralysed. I felt each insertion of the needle and hoped it was the last one. Finally I heard him begin to pack up and I began to feel the pain relief from the epidural creep over me, I cried with relief. The registrar said 'I'm not sure that's in the correct spot, I'll come back and check in half an hour and re-adjust it if I need to.' I was praying that it was in the right spot so he didn't have to insert the needle again. I was told that a bolus dose was given first and that then ongoing if I felt pain I was able to press the button once every 30 minutes.

The day after the birth my partner took a photo of my back and I was complaining of pain, I had nine visible needle marks from these epidural attempts.

After about 20 minutes the pain relief wore off on one side of my body but remained working on the other side. I started to completely feel the contractions again down half of my body, it was so strange and uncomfortable as I also now could not reposition myself in anyway to ease the pain of the contractions. The nurses turned me onto one side saying that sometimes this could help even out the medication to the other side but it didn't do anything. The midwives called for an anaesthetist, but no one came. I begged and begged for help, they told me the hospital was busy so I would have to wait. I screamed in pain and continued to beg for someone to help me, I was very distressed and scared. The contractions continued hard and fast. In the end there was no pain relief from the epidural or break throughs.

The midwife warned that I was having too many contractions within a certain period of time and so finally the cyntocin was reduced back down. I was expecting some relief soon after but it never came until I was in the operating theatre hours later.

Another anaesthetist came into the room sometime later and said that if he tried to adjust the needle it may fail and that he would then have to re do the epidural. He offered to instead give another bolus, adjust the needle and increase the rate at which I could press for more. I couldn't speak but kept nodding.

The whole period of when I had the epidural in place, I was only numb completely for the first 40 minutes until it wore off to one side. I barely had any pain relief the whole time until the second bolus was given and this only lasted another 40 minutes, however it had almost completely worn off as I was told to start pushing.

Someone checked my dilation and said I was ready to start pushing. After about half hour of pushing I started to feel intense pain in my lower back with each push, all the pain relief had worn off but I still had strangely numb and tingly legs, meaning I could not use them as leverage to push. I was not coping with the pain and begging for something to help me. I couldn't understand why the pain was all in my lower back and not my vagina area.

The fear I would feel between every contraction, knowing there was another one coming was crippling. Between contractions was the only time I could speak and felt aware of my surroundings. I was using this time to scream at staff and my partner for help, and this was exhausting me further. The midwife and doctor would not even make eye contact with me. I felt so alone and unsupported by the medical staff who were supposedly there to support and help me.

The midwife told me she could see my baby's head with each push and that it would not be much longer. With every contraction I prayed it would be my last. How wrong I was. In total I pushed for 2.5 hours. I kept being told I was progressing but clearly I was not. The position I was in was so uncomfortable and the pressure on my lower back was horrible.

My partner and I noticed the doctor and midwife leave the room 3+ times and talk to each other in the hallway, when they came back in my partner would ask what was wrong. They would say 'nothing she's doing great.' My partner queried again after a few times 'what were you talking about' and got no answer. This made us both feel very anxious. What did they need to leave the room to discuss? Why were we not being included in their planning or worries? I felt so helpless and like an object or an animal that did not deserve to be consulted or considered.

For hours I was screaming and begging for help and the doctors and nurses would just ignore me. They all seemed to carry on like this was routine for them as I sobbed for them to please kill me. My partner begged them to do something and they said there was nothing they could do. The ward was busy and no one could help yet. I felt like I was being tortured and people were just standing around watching. No one would listen to me, help me, acknowledge me or comfort me except my partner. I had no control and was helpless at their mercy and timeframes. My partner cried and told me he was so sorry and that he didn't know what to do. The staff watched this all occurring and had no response or emotion, we felt pathetic. I could not believe that there was not one person in the room who was willing to stand up and say hey this is not okay, let's help this woman.

I remember vomiting three times during labour and feeling like I was choking as I was on my back and swallowing the vomit.

I was getting no breaks between contractions because the cyntocin was turned up so high and I had no pain relief and my baby was smashing into my spine with each contraction.

They finally had a doctor come in at around 2am and do a scan, he told us that the baby's head was on an angle and obstructed and that I would not be able to push him out, so would need a c-section. My partner asked if this was my only option and he said yes, and that I was pushing the baby into my spine area and so a natural birth would have never been possible. We quickly agreed as I was blacking out due to the pain and just wanted this to all be over. The doctor asked the nurse why she hadn't offered gas and air again, she said 'oh yeah she can try some of that.'

They then had to prep the operating theatre, complete documentation and get all the staff ready, this took so long and I continued to scream and writhe in pain while puffing on the gas. The doctor came back in to get my signature and asked the nurse why the cyntocin was still running when I was going to have a c-section, she looked embarrassed and turned off, but it was too late, I was still contracting back to back up until the spinal took effect on the operating table. I could have had a break from the pain but she neglected to turn it off and so I endured hours longer than needed of these contractions. I spiked a temp of 38.4 during this time due to the stress on my body and my baby did a meconium poo before he was born due to being in distress.

Why didn't someone check for or notice my baby's head being obstructed after hours of me pushing? Could they not see the lack of progress? Why didn't they take action to find out what the problem was? What were they privately discussing in the hallway that they wouldn't disclose to me?

Before they took me to theatre the midwife told me she would need to take the gas from me. I told her I was not letting it go, it was the only thing giving me any relief as the contractions continued relentlessly. She told me she would unplug this machine and put me on another one. I told her to give me the other one first as I didn't believe her. By this point I had zero trust in anything the staff were telling me and in their empathy regarding the pain and trauma I was enduring.

I remember bits of the trip to the operating theatre. I remember feeling like it took hours. I remember staff staring at me as I was wheeled past them screaming. I begged the man wheeling the bed to help me and he would not make eye contact with me. I gripped my partner's arm as he walked beside me sobbing and repeating 'I'm so sorry, I love you.' I remember looking down and seeing that I was clamping my legs together due to the pain but not being able to pry them apart no matter how hard I tried. I remember thinking I was going to die and thinking that my baby was already dead as I was crushing his head between my legs.

When we got to the operating theatre I was being asked to sign things but couldn't hold a pen properly. My partner asked if he could sign on my behalf and they said he couldn't. I grabbed the pen and scrawled something.

In the operating room they prepped for what felt like forever while I lay there contracting still. The anaesthetist explained that he needed to wait for a gap in contractions to do my spinal, I was so afraid I would jerk from a contraction and be paralysed by the spinal needle. The relief once it was in was amazing, I cried and finally became aware of my surroundings. My partner finally came into the room and held my hand. The doctor was down at my open legs and after a few minutes told me he thought he could deliver my baby with forceps. He was positive and encouraging. He asked me to push as hard as I could three times. Our son was born and was taken and checked for meconium aspiration before being brought to me. Unfortunately my partner didn't get to cut the umbilical cord. I felt numb and unsure if that actually was my baby alive in front of me, I was so sure he had died inside me. We were both expecting to be told that he had not survived the birth or that he had a serious injury from the labour and birth.

In recovery the midwife came over to me and proudly said 'we did it, you're beautiful boy is here.' I remember thinking 'we did it? You did nothing. Not even your job. You made me feel nothing but fear. No control over what was happening to me and my baby. You kept things secret from me. You took no action to help my fear and pain. You did not call for emergency

help. You neglected to turn off the cyntocin or offer me pain relief, even gas and air.’ I weakly smiled at her and willed her to go away.

Once the spinal wore off the pain was horrific. I could not sleep, the endone did not seem to be helping. I again asked for something to move my bowels, it had been 4 days and I was scared of now being so constipated post birth, nothing was given to me. I asked to see a doctor as the pain was unbearable. My partner showered me as I sobbed. I couldn’t even tell what was hurting, it just all ached between my legs. When the doctor came the next day he explained that I had required a large episiotomy which had torn further during the forceps delivery. He also noted that I had a large haemorrhoid from pushing for so long. He told me the pain would improve. He gave me a non steroidal cream with no local anaesthetic for the haemorrhoid. I later discovered that this was not the correct option for me and that the haemorrhoid was one of the things causing me so much pain. I had never had a haemorrhoid before so did not know that was part of the pain I was feeling. The doctor identified the haemorrhoid way too late, I was taking so much endone and it wasn’t helping because that was a major source of my pain. The doctor would have seen this in the operating theatre, why was this not passed on to be treated?

I asked to be checked again the next day as I felt no improvement in the pain and was not coping with it, the doctor noted that I may have an infection as my baby did a poo inside me. They put me on antibiotics, I was frustrated that this wasn’t picked up as a risk from day one. I was told I needed to wean off the endone but every time I tried I would be sobbing with pain. I continued to beg for help to move my bowels, I was given two Movicol which obviously did nothing at this point. I ordered pear juice at every chance. I was really concerned at how long it had been but no staff seemed to share the concern.

One nurse checked by lower back the day after I gave birth and said that I was starting to develop a pressure sore from the position I had been pushing in for so long. The nurses massaged it with cream a few times to avoid it progressing.

After three nights in hospital post birth we decided to go home if we could. We did not feel that being at the hospital was of any point. My partner was unable to get any sleep on the bench and the regular nurse checks added to the lack of sleep for all three of us. I was hating being in hospital, I felt so traumatised by the whole experience and just wanted to leave this place and all the staff and be in my own bed. I asked about the fact that I had still not moved my bowels for 8 days now. I had never gone more than a few days in my whole life and so thought this could be a serious health issue now. I was already thinking about how painful it could be when I finally did go as the episiotomy stitches reached nearly to my rectum. I was told that they would still release me and it was suggested I keep up the pear juice, not to worry, it would happen.

As we experienced so many shift changes we had positive and negative experiences with nurses and midwives. There were some who were on the ball and there were multiple who I

had to remind to give me my medication. One nurse asked me to set an alarm on my phone for when my medications were due and to then press the buzzer. I was so scared of them wearing off that I would lose sleep waiting for when they were due. Why was I made to worry about this when I was literally trying to survive each day.

In the end it was 11 days between bowel movements, when it happened it was horrifically painful and I was so scared I would bust my stitches, I cried a lot. I bled from the rectum. The next few times were nearly as bad, I was taking so much Movicol, but it barely helped, each time I bled.

I was in so much pain and so immobile that my partner just rolled me over side to side so that I could breastfeed our son. My partner did absolutely everything else for our son and he fed, dressed and showered me. It was such a heavy burden for my partner to manage for weeks. It was a week before I changed a nappy. I cried almost constantly. I was traumatised. I felt no connection to my son. I was so exhausted but every time I closed my eyes I had flashbacks of the labour that stopped me from sleeping.

The episiotomy recovery was so much worse than I could have ever imagined. The nurses checked it each visit and I cried asking if something was wrong, why was I in so much pain? This can't be normal?

In the two weeks after birth I passed three large chunks of tissue (placenta), each between the size of a 10c and 50c piece. They were not blood, I pressed them against toilet paper and they stayed solid, they were thick. Upon revisiting the hospital records it reads 'placenta complete', this is obviously not truthful. When I told the visiting nurse about passing placenta she looked very concerned, spoke about the high risk of life threatening infection and suggested I go to the Emergency Department if this occurs again.

During post-natal visits it was identified that I was taking a very high level of pain killers. I was surprised to hear this, but no other option was provided to me, I felt concern that I would develop a dependency but so much of going without them for any moment of time. I had taken my medication late a few times over that initial two week period and then result was crippling pain.

During my recovery I had high levels of anxiety and felt so depressed most days, there didn't seem to be any of the positives or the 'love bubble' that mothers mention. I was also suffering with guilt regarding my bonding issues with my baby. It took 10 weeks for me to feel love for my baby, I remember the day I finally felt it, it was a relief but also so sad to me that it had taken that long. I realise now that at the time he was a constant reminder of all my suffering and trauma. The guilt I feel about the first months of his life and the shell of a mother he had makes me feel sick in the stomach if I think about it for too long.

At one point my partner told me he wanted to take me to the doctor. He could not bare to watch me in so much pain and later told me that he was also worried about me hurting our son or myself. He had to put me in the car laying on my side, as I couldn't sit down. My doctor let me cry and talk to her and gave me a referral to a birth trauma counsellor. I couldn't voice any details of my birth without breaking down, so my partner took me and told her the story while I sat and sobbed.

Our baby started showing signs of favouring turning his head one way. There was no discussion during post-natal visits of risk and possible presence of infant torticollis. We identified the odd positioning of his neck and as it persisted and made breast feeding more difficult, we eventually took our baby to a specialist chiropractor. He has required multiple adjustments over the past 18 months to correct the damage done from his head being pushed at the wrong angle for so long.

At my check ups with the nurses in home and with my GP at 6 weeks post birth, I kept saying that things felt different internally in my vagina. I was surprised that no internal examinations occurred at any point post birth. On day decided to check how my stitches were healing by squatting over a hand mirror. I was horrified to externally see my bowel pushing through the wall of my vagina. I could see the ridges of my bowel protruding out of the opening of my vagina. I screamed for my partner thinking this was an emergency and I needed to go to hospital now. He calmed me, took a look himself and called his mother who is an RN, for advice. I sobbed and sobbed thinking I would never recover, I felt disgusting and was scared. I saw a GP the following day who gave me a referral to a specialist . We took our 8 week old baby up there with us. This was such a tough day as I was still recovering and we had not yet travelled any distance with our newborn. He screamed the whole way home and we spent a good amount of time on the side of the highway with both him and I crying. I remember thinking that I should be at home recovering but instead I was having to manage this awful issue.

The specialist we saw told me I had a bowel prolapse, bladder prolapse and uterine prolapse. She told me the majority of the damage would have been caused by being made to push for so long with my baby's head being obstructed and also notably the poor management of my constipation in hospital. She spoke about the amount of pressure that would have been placed on my bowel and in turn the wall of my vagina, for such a long time. She told me she was disgusted at the care I had received in hospital and angry that from what she could tell, the majority of this issue could have been prevented.

At every check it was never picked up that I had a significant prolapse. Why was it never discussed with me the significant risk of prolapses given my birth experience? Since giving birth to our son I have not been given one internal examination, this is concerning especially considering that I now know that a forceps birth has increased risks of vaginal, uterine and bowel prolapse. Why was I not given a discharge letter for my GP noting risk of prolapses? I didn't even know to ask about this.

My constipation was not addressed or taken seriously at any point in hospital or at the post natal home visits, even when I raised my concerns again and again. Why is this okay? Why was I discharged without them ensuring I had moved my bowels? I now know that a full bowel can make birthing a baby a lot harder, it can get in the way of the birth canal.

Due to my prolapse I have daily toileting issues. Every time I move my bowels I have to firmly push on my perinium or insert my fingers into my vagina and push towards my rectum, to ensure I empty my bowel. If I don't do this I can strain and strain and nothing happens as the faeces are simply pushing into the lax wall of my vagina. I can feel this happening, it is an awful sensation. It has been confirmed to me by medical professionals that this is how I will be required to toilet until I have a surgery to correct the internal damage. I continue to take tablets everyday to assist with my ongoing constipation issues. Almost every bowel movement is painful to the point where I fear it. Surely bleeding each time is not normal? And not just small amounts, sometimes enough to stain the toilet water red. At 5 months post birth I had my first bowel movement with no bleeding. It is now about 50% of the time where I will have some fresh blood when I wipe. I have addressed my diet and water intake but I can't seem to improve much more than this now.

After weekly work with a Physiotherapist and minimal improvement, it was decided that I try wearing a pessary. I have now worn a pessary 24/7 for 18 months to hold all my internal organs in place. I take it out to clean it weekly and this is such an awful reminder of how broken I am. For months I used a tens machine to internally stimulate my pelvic floor muscles in an effort to strengthen them. There has been some improvement but I still struggle with bladder leakage everyday and so wear liners. I have had a few incidents of sneezing or coughing and needing to come home from work and change my underwear and my jeans.

For a year I couldn't exercise anywhere near like I used to, swimming only. Exercise is what helps me cope mentally, it was a big part of my life pre-birth, I was so fit and healthy. My birth experience has removed that coping mechanism as an option for me. For months I paid for a weekly specialised exercise class that was modified to cater to my injuries. I was advised by my physio to not lift anything heavier than my baby (6.5kgs). No running, jumping, squatting, breath holding exercises. There was no getting back to things after my six week check up like most mothers, it was a year until I went back to the gym and I still now am very cautious and nowhere near back to being fit and able to workout properly again.

I can't use tampons due to internal damage, they move and come out. I'm scared I will lose them in inside me.

My partner and I used to have a great sex life and that has been taken away from us. I can feel my bowel move during sex, I can feel the contents of my bowel move during sex. It is uncomfortable and humiliating. I can't properly relax and enjoy sex as the whole time I feel fear that something will be damaged internally if we aren't careful. It has changed me from

an outgoing and fun person sexually, to a person who is cautious and avoids sex. This is affecting our relationship, we both miss how we were.

I continue to have what I feel may be nerve pain in my lower back where I the epidural was injected so many times. This happens if I sit down without being cautious and slowly lowering my body and also sometimes when I twist my torso to look or reach around.

My partner and I imagined 2-3 children and we are now terrified to fall pregnant again. This experience has ruined our future ideas of having more than one child. How can we face birth again after this experience? How could we ever trust our local hospital and medical staff again?

I have been told that I should not have my repair surgery until I am sure I will never fall pregnant again as the pressure or being pregnant and giving birth again will damage everything again and I will need to repeat the surgery. I have told the doctor that I don't want to have another baby but they have insisted that I wait some time and see if I still feel the same, I just want to be fixed.

My body and my baby were not ready for birth. I was rushed and put on a schedule that suited the hospital. My birth was a fearful and horrific experience where I was made to feel like a number who was taking too much time and making too much fuss. I wish everyday that I had ignored medical advice and let my baby come when he was ready. The advice I was given was not what was best for my baby and I, it was what was best for the hospital, their timeframes and staffing.

The more I share my birth experience with others the more horrific stories I hear. should be ashamed at the trauma they have caused so many mothers in this community.

I have been engaging in therapy since the birth, including EMDR in an effort to heal from some of the trauma. I had weekly sessions for months but am now going monthly as the cost has been enormous. My partner has also engaged in multiple therapy sessions to try to process this trauma.

I have had a terrible time mentally post birth and still struggle to this day. Having a newborn was hard enough without the mental, physical and emotional trauma my birth experience left me to manage. I have suffered terribly with depression, often leaving me in bed crying for days on end. I don't understand why this was not something that was flagged as a risk for me? Why was no one really asking how I was? It took a year for me to finally broach the subject with a GP, after my partner telling me that if I did not he would take me and talk to them with me. This was so difficult for me and I just wish that someone had have asked. I was eventually diagnosed with Post Natal Depression and accepted he help of medication.

When I think back on that first year of my son's life I am overwhelmed with sadness. I feel so empty and hollow thinking about how sad and broken I was. I feel so much guilt for the vacant and miserable mother I was for my son. He deserved so much more. I can never get that time back with my tiny baby. That has been ripped from me and I didn't even realise the extent of it until I was medicated and had been through countless hours of therapy, and could reflect on that time.

The damage I suffered and continue to live with every day is so significant and it could have been avoided.