

Submission
No 273

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had my first baby on 17 September 2020 at .

On 14 September 2020 I rang my midwife to ask if I could have a check up in person at the hospital as I had only been seen two or three times due to covid. I had not felt my baby move for some time.

When I presented to the hospital I was hooked up to a machine that monitored the babies heart beat. Almost immediately the midwife pressed a button and there were multiple doctors and midwives rushed to my bed. It was explained to me that my baby's heart beat was not what it should be. The midwife told me to call my husband and get him to the hospital. I completely panicked and couldn't make the phone call myself so the midwife did it for me.

I had an obstetrician put his hands in me for a physical examination. He asked permission but didn't tell me what it was for. I was too hysterical to ask.

I was then told that I would have to be induced to start to try and get the baby out. I was given a few options and chose the cervical tape to be inserted. This was very painful and I was offered some Panadol. This did not achieve anything and I did not dilate. The doctors told me I would need to have my waters broken to get my body to start contractions. This was the single most painful experience of my life. I consented to some medical students to look in on the procedure. If I had of known what it would entail I would have declined. The obstetrician/doctor I don't even know who he was, told my husband to 'hold her down by the shoulders so she doesn't push herself away from me'. He was absolutely horrified. I was offered no pain relief before hand and told afterward that I could have asked for some. The doctor tried twice and said my cervix was 'jammed shut' and laughed and told me that he would go and get someone with 'smaller hands'. Once my water broke no one told me that it would continue to gush out and I was given a medicine ball with a towel to sit on. I was then hooked up to what I thought was just an IV. The midwives said it had medicine in it to begin my contractions. The pain went from 0-100 in an instant. There was no warning, no explanation about how it worked. One midwife told me this was going to be more painful than a natural contraction would ever be. I was so shocked. I didn't have time to prepare myself mentally or physically. I just remember sitting on this exercise ball with fluid running down my legs and not being able to breathe because of the pain. I had done my research and prepared myself for all sorts of labour techniques and I didn't get to experience any of them. After 20+ hours I was given an epidural due to my baby's heart rate. I was hooked up the entire time to have the heart beat monitored. As soon as I had the epidural the midwives said that they had to call in an emergency team to get the baby out via cesarean as it had been too long with irregular heart beat for the baby. I was told to sign some papers 'because you could die'.

I was wheeled into theatre and was shaking uncontrollably from all of the drugs. I had a midwife holding a sick bag to my face the entire procedure. When my son was born I did not want to hold him or see him. It is something that will hurt my heart forever. I vividly remember asking them to 'put me back together' before I even wanted to hold my son. I believe it was true survival instinct that I acted this way. My son was born completely healthy 9 pound 2 and was told 'he could have just been holding onto his umbilical cord which is very common' in

response to the abnormal heart rate. I was also told that if I had of been seen in person more during my pregnancy and especially in the last few weeks they would have been able to see this baby was 'big'. The staff admitted that given it was the peak of covid in 2020 they were scrambling with their policies and procedures with caring for pregnant women and new mothers.

My mental health was severely affected by the birth of my son and this flowed into my second pregnancy. I didn't not enjoy my second pregnancy and suffered regular bouts of anxiety and was terrified of giving birth again. I decided to opt for a cesarean for my second birth because I could not mentally deal with the fact that if trying for a natural birth, the circumstances surrounding my son would happen all over again just to end up in an emergency procedure. I felt absolutely ashamed when I made this decision but it was ultimately the best for my mental health.

My second birth via cesarean was also terrifying as I sat in the operating theatre it all came flooding back to me. My aftercare was all over the place. We had one in home visit from a midwife and then nothing until I made an appointment for a community nurse to come past when I had concerns over my daughters weight. I was promised midwife visits up to two weeks post birth but was told they were all run off their feet. I presented to ED 2 weeks after my daughter was born with a UTI that I was told was almost septic after seeing two separate GP's who told me I'd just had a cesarean and of course I would have irritation from having a catheter and sent me off to the chemist for some cream.

I had vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, fever, hallucinations etc by the time I presented to ED.

I had two further infections and 3 courses of antibiotics before I asked for a vaginal swab which came back showing not a UTI but a nasty bacterial overgrowth likely picked up post procedure from the hospital. This meant that the strain of antibiotics given to me were not effective in fighting the infection. All the while having an exclusively breastfed baby who suffered from the 3 lots of antibiotics. I feel that birthing mothers are just swept under the rug when it comes to aftercare. We are not listened to and we have to fight for our voices to be heard.