

Submission
No 274

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a mother of a 1 year old, and I experienced and am still experiencing some level of birth trauma, both mentally and physically. My vaginal birth did not go the way I expected, with a need for augmentation during spontaneous labour and instrumental delivery. The lack of empowerment during the latter half of my birth left me feeling as if something had happened to me rather than by me. It was outside of my control, like an out of body experience, and I was left feeling dehumanised by the procedural protocols of our healthcare system. I couldn't fully enjoy the birth of my newborn. My mind was racing with thoughts of 'what if' or 'if only I had just'. A few days after the birth, the main doctor on duty who delivered my baby came to talk to me about what happened. This was the first time anybody had sat me down to explain what had occurred, why certain decisions were made and have a two way conversation about the outcomes.

I felt heard and seen, however a fifteen minute conversation was not enough for me to recover from that mental trauma. Physically, I was rushed to theatre after about 20 minutes of giving birth. I had limited skin to skin time and wasn't able to breastfeed my baby. I spent the next two hours separated from my baby whilst I was given stitches. At the time, I still didn't feel fully within my body and that coupled with the local anaesthetic to my lower half left me feeling completely powerless. Although I was spoken to by many medical professionals as to what was happening, having just given birth I found it difficult to register all this information and especially as I was separated from my partner during this period. I didn't fully appreciate the physical impact of my birth injuries until much later. A few weeks after returning home I realised that I was unable to control my bowel movements. Although I started to recover after the first 6 months, I am still having these bowel issues today over 13 months after birth.

The damage to my pelvic floor knocked my confidence. I was unable to be in public with fear of having an accident with my bowels, and on the occasions I did have to leave my home during those first 6 months I did have many accidents. I still carry a spare pair of knickers now whenever I'm outside of my home. Even in the home during those first 6 months I found it difficult to fully care for my daughter during those moments where I lacked control. Although I was aware that trauma to the pelvic floor region was a common occurrence post birth, I wasn't fully prepared for the reality of it (including the mental strain) and didn't instantly feel well equipped to understand what was wrong with me and how I should go about dealing with this. I'm sharing my story in the hope that better care, education and services can be provided to women both pre and post natal to ensure that every woman giving birth has full awareness of the choices that they make or are made during birth, support to help reduce physical trauma such as specialised care provider support/ physio/osteop and support for mental wellbeing in the longer term post natal period not just immediately after birth.