

Submission
No 279

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I work in the maternity health services in allied health. I have a lot of stories but for today I will just focus on my own.

My Son was born via emergency cesarean section at 35+3 with a birth weight of 2040g due to developing HELLP syndrome.

Due to the nature of the HELLP syndrome and respiratory distress my son was taken from me without me even touching him. My Son was over 24 hours old before I touched him and 30 hours old before I held him. As having magnesium sulfate I was unable to go into NICU. My son was also intubated and it took many hours for someone to come and tell me this, after my husband telling me 'he has a tube in his mouth', working in health this was very distressing for me to hear from my husband and he didn't really understand the severity of this nor could explain to me why it was happening.

One of the biggest struggles of our time in NICU was that my son didn't feel like our baby. Many of the nurses particularly those of the older 45+ were very strict about how we interacted with my son. Stating, no he needs to stay in the cot so he can grow. Now whilst my son was in NICU there was only a few days of the time that he was unwell most of it was just feeding and growing concerns. The nurses pushed their agenda onto us and how we parent, they watched everything we did like hawks. We constantly felt judged and stressed at every temp check that our baby wouldn't be high enough for them so we could hold him. One nurse even took it to the extreme of watching intently while breastfeeding and state 'you want to go home don't you we need to see that he can feed'. Every interaction was like a test he had to pass so that we could interact with him.

Whilst my son and was in NICU we had donated breast milk for him so that he did not need formula. My husband was very aware of my request to not use formula and communicated this early on to staff. Whilst the medical team were ok with the donor milk after we had signed the waiver form. The nurses staff were not keen to use it. Asking us many questions about where it was coming from and 'how well did we know the donors'.

I felt like NICU was not very breastmilk and breastfeeding friendly, in particular preparing for discharge the anxiety and stress about feeling if I wanted my baby not to have a bottle that I had to sleep in a lounge chair 10 days after having a C-section and being so unwell.

The impact of the delayed holding and ongoing issues in NICU lead to significant post natal depression/ lack of attachment and subsequently suicidal ideation.

Whilst I was informed that was the ramifications of the HELLP syndrome and not being able to go into NICU I feel if there was a high dependency maternity / NICU ward my experience of birth would not have been as impacted as I would have spent more time with my baby.

I also had significant issues with my babies weight postnatally and I was unable to access lactation consultant and the child and family health nurses pushed formula on me. I had access to money to pay for a private lactation consultant and this changed my feeding experience and my baby started to make some gains without formula. I am very aware that a lot of others would not have the knowledge or the finances to seek independent advice from a lactation consultant.

I also feel if I had access to a maternity social worker or a perinatal infant mental health workers would have assisted me in healing from my birth experience.