

Submission
No 284

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had my second baby in December 2021 at Hospital.

My experience with the Midwife Group Practice and with my assigned midwives was amazing, they did the most fantastic job and were endlessly supportive. But elements of my birth were extremely stressful due to factors out of individual Midwives control, but certainly within the control of the hospital and maternity department.

At the time of my son's birth NSW had been out of covid lockdown for several months, things were getting back to normal. The omicron wave had started though - and being Christmas holiday season, everyone was on alert again.

I had mild cold and flu symptoms in the weeks leading up to my due date - I was told by the hospital that I couldn't attend my regular midwife appointments which was incredibly stressful and unsettling. My amazing midwife expressed her dismay at this, but it was out of her hands as a directive of her employers.

I was also told I needed to get a formal covid test in order to confirm the status of my illness before my birth - but that the hospital would not facilitate this in any way. It was Christmas of 2021, the government had a requirement that anyone who was travelling must present a negative covid test, and the only places to get tested were official sites and drive-through testing centres - all of which had lines that were hours, and kilometres long.

At 38.5 weeks pregnant with no support from Gosford Hospital, I got up at 3am (hoping this would expedite the process) to drive to my closest drive-through testing location. I waited a total of 6 hours in my car, unable to get out, with no bathroom nearby, uncomfortable and concerned, to get tested as the hospital required.

With the volume of tests being done, results didn't come quickly. Neighbours of mine who were travelling got results the next day. But my results didn't come back at all in the days leading up to my birth as I waited anxiously at home - despite the fact that I had expressed the urgent medical need in the paperwork.

I went into labour at 39+3, and stayed home

as long as I could. My beautiful midwife advised that because I was still symptomatic and still didn't have a covid result - I would have to come to the rear patient transport entry of the hospital to be RAT tested and escorted to the birthing suites.

My husband and I followed her instructions, but my labour progressed quickly and there was not enough time for this process to take place - my son was born in the carpark at 12.45 on

New Year's Eve, with only my husband, myself and our amazing midwife who only just made it in time.

After our son was born, our midwife advised she had to follow protocol of the hospital and maternity department regarding my possible covid symptoms - we were left to wait in the cold carpark in the middle of the night, our baby only wrapped in one small blanket, my placenta and umbilical cord still attached, for over 20 minutes with no one coming to help or follow the covid procedure we were supposedly bound by. Our midwife agreed on the ludicrous nature of the situation and eventually took us up to the birthing suites. Once there she did a beautiful job of caring for us and supporting us, but she did so alone, with no birth suite staff supporting her and no one else checking on us at all. She reluctantly recommended we go home as soon as possible because she didn't want us or our newborn sent to a ward with covid-positive patients. We agreed and decided to go home, feeling we had no choice.

No covid testing was offered at any time through this process - a simple test that was readily available in hospital settings, that could have alleviated a huge amount of stress and avoided a traumatic situation for both us and our midwife.

My covid test finally came back 2 days later - negative.

Though I understand that covid was an extraordinary time in healthcare, and the world - the failure of our maternity system to support the stakeholders in their ecosystem; from birthing families to midwives - was and is disappointing, sad, and to many families, eternally damaging. The maternity department could have taken any number of steps (providing support to pregnant women with any illness or covid concern - as a start) to safeguard and support families like us in these situations (and many others I know of with similar experiences) but we felt at the bottom of the priority list. Our midwives at Hospital (and I'm sure, across most NSW hospitals) are angels on earth, caring for patients every day for the love of the job - and I'm sure they have at many times, felt unsupported by the organisations they work for too.

Our public hospitals should be advocates, supporters and caretakers of the most vulnerable people in society first - and businesses and corporate organisations second. Outcomes for birthing people and families should top the priority list - every time.