

Submission  
No 291

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 15 August 2023

---

Partially  
Confidential

My traumatic birth occurred in January 2021 at \_\_\_\_\_ public hospital. It was without a doubt the worst experience of my life, and it continues to impact on me daily.

The harm done to me was mainly the result of having an “inattentive” midwife. That is the most flattering way I can describe her practice during the 36 hours that I laboured in the hospital. She appeared to be concerned with taking and documenting observations and not much else. She did care for me or show concern for my ability to cope (when clearly, I was not coping). She did not manage my nausea, which was quite bad and preventing me from eating. She did not manage my pain according to my wishes; withholding gas and other non-opioid pain management from me. She did not help with me the position of my baby or encourage me with breathing or any other birthing techniques. She sat, with her back to us, at her computer for most of the labour. She was my MGP midwife and I deeply regret going with this model of care as she was the worst person to enter the birthing suite on those days. Most other midwives and Drs were entirely fine, professional and caring. But they assumed that she was doing her job and caring for me (she wasn't). There was no oversight of her or us. If there had been some perhaps myself and my baby would have had less trauma. Unfortunately for me, I was too overwhelmed and vulnerable to advocate for myself at that time.

I won't have any more children. I don't think I could cope with pregnancy or birth given my injuries. I live with pelvic organ prolapse. Daily pain. Incontinence. Pain worse at ovulation and during menstruation. Movement restriction. Can't use tampons so can't swim with kids when they want to. Sex not fun. Hard to lift heavy things. Hard to even push a shopping trolley. The GP says it'll probably get worse when menopause comes; something to look forward to (not). These Hospital Acquired Injuries (HAI) are not counted. They don't count because the hospital that caused them does no follow up of women who birth there; even when those births are very traumatic. This needs to change because the practices that caused these injuries won't change otherwise.

My baby was delivered after 4 hours of end stage pushing. He was stuck. It was quite apparent he was stuck from the beginning of the pushing. The midwife didn't call the Dr as she should have. She coached me to push for 4 hours without a break. Cruel. Dangerous. Barbaric. She told me at the beginning of the pushing that I “had 45 minutes to birth my baby” or the Drs would come and intervene. She seemed more concerned to avoid input from the Drs than she was about me or my safety. I followed her orders. I pushed as hard as I could, for 4 hours.

When the Dr finally attended to assist, I was beside myself. The room was full of strangers, all privacy gone. I saw someone on the corner call theatres to let them know we might be on our way. I felt terror. I feared death. I had barely eaten in 2 days. I had been pushing at 100% effort for 4 hours. The Dr said something like “I hear that you want help to deliver your baby?”...that was my “informed consent” to several failed attempts at vacuum delivery and then an episiotomy and forceps delivery. At no point in my pre-natal care or in the birthing suite did any medical professional discuss the risks to me from forceps. Procedures and risks were not explained. If I had known the risks, I would not have consented to forceps; I would

have elected for a caesarean birth and preserved my own physical health. I live with a pelvic organ prolapse; forever. Physio can't fix it. There's an avulsion. I'm sure from the forceps caused it.

Added to the physical injuries there are the emotional distress and mental health consequences of receiving harmful care and being separated from my baby right after birth. You see he was taken from me. That same midwife made the decision for him to go to special care nursery, then proceeded to keep me in the birthing suite for approximately 6 hours. She didn't shower me or clean me up for around 4 hours. There was no hot meal or even any tea and sympathy for I had endured. I lay in blood-stained sheets, vomit in my hair etc. She sat at her computer at the nurse's station (said she'd get her paperwork done faster there than in the birthing suite). I was alone. I wasn't pregnant but didn't have my baby. Very disturbed. I couldn't reach my phone to let family know I was ok/alive. I had lost approximately 1litre of blood in the delivery and the Dr couldn't stop the bleeding so had left a plug inside my vagina to stem the flow. I was scared that I might bleed more. I could not reach the call bell as it was off the bed. I feared for my life again. Eventually she returned to me regaling me of what events had happened on the ward.

My baby was born at 6pm. At around 1130pm the midwife transported me and handed me over to another midwife on the maternity ward. I was taken to a dark, shared room with another Mum who was already snoring. They thought I wanted to sleep. I asked to see my baby. I had not had the chance to feed him or hold him. I was desperate at that point. They agreed. An orderly pushed me to the Special Care nursery on a hard vinyl wheelchair. It was agony. I was sitting on an episiotomy, that huge tampon to stop me from haemorrhaging, oh and my hospital acquired haemorrhoids. I didn't care; I only wanted to hold my baby. Not going to happen apparently. The staff member looking after my son promptly told me that she was "too busy to get my son out for me to hold him". By now I had no fight left in me. I cried silently next to my son. I was alone as my support people had gone home to sleep. I listened to the staff member complain about how she was expected Premi twins soon and no one had set them up on the computer, so she had to do it etc. She noticed my eyes pouring with tears as I silently cried. She felt the need to justify her behaviour apparently as she went on to say that my son had a sore head and "not even she was HANDLING him". He sounded like a box. My gorgeous newborn baby boy was being cared for by a human who was so uncaring she wouldn't let me hold him. I had never known such cruelty. I returned to my shared room and listened to my neighbour snore. I wept until 6am when I was able to get someone to wheel my bed back to the nursery so that I could hold and feed my baby. We endured 2 more nights of separation as he slept in the place of beeps and monitors and 4 hourly wake ups for scheduled feeds. Each day when the Drs did their rounds, I would try to find out how my son was doing. It was a different paediatrician each day, they all remarked that he looked like a healthy baby and that he probably didn't really need to be there. It was curious. I was broken. I followed their rules.

We left hospital and I returned home to care for my son. I had my anaemia, physical injuries and PTSD to contend with. PNAD followed. Two and a half years later and I am still affected. There are so many possible triggers for trauma. Living with pelvic organ prolapse is an invisible disability for which there isn't much support.

I wish that I had gone to the private hospital, where I believe I could have seen a Dr sooner, but I didn't. My understanding is that they were short staffed and that's why I was left to labour so long when I wasn't progressing or coping with the same. I wish that I'd had a c-section but nobody gave me that choice. I wish that someone had explained the risks of the forceps to me, but nobody did. So much of the birth and the subsequent stay at hospital were disempowering. The separation was especially difficult when there wasn't really any medical reason for it. The grief at not having experiences the "golden hour" or being able to comfort my son as they did things to him. The guilt of not having been there for him when he was at his most vulnerable will probably never leave me.

Please do what you can to change the way public hospitals are working. It really feels like they are just trying not to have infant mortality (a worthy cause), but no one is caring for the mothers, and we are important to. Women centred care would include proper informed consent. It would mean staffing the birthing suite with enough staff that babies can be cared for to (if needed). It would mean having enough Drs around to attend to instrumental births in time and not too late was my case. And then, for the women like me who receive HAls we need to provide better care. We need women to count too.

Please help.