

Submission
No 296

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had my first baby in 2009 in _____ . My blood pressure had been creeping up from 28 weeks and at 32 weeks after attending a clinic to monitor my baby they said I couldn't go home and needed to stay in hospital. I was diagnosed with pre-eclampsia. The care I received while in hospital for 4 weeks prior to the birth was really good. My one frustration was that at the time I really didn't understand what was happening to me and I don't feel like anyone clearly communicated what was really going on in my body. At 36 weeks they needed to deliver my baby and I tried for a natural delivery but the syntocin drip kept casing my baby to be in distress. At the end of a long day I had a caesarean. It wasn't until I was in hospital with my second pregnancy that in my 12 week obstetrician appointment I was blandly informed that I'd had an episode in recovery because of the pre-eclampsia. There was no more information given and the obstetrician was not interested in elaborating but I found it profoundly unsettling that something could have happened to me and in my body while in recovery that I was not informed of.

My second birth in 2010 also in _____ hospital was a VBAC, I was also induced via syntocin drip. The labour took a while to get started and I had to be strapped to the monitor at all time which meant not being able to move around, use the shower etc I was stuck on the bed on my back. After the slow start labour kicked in quite quickly and I found myself unable to handle the contractions well while lying in bed. A midwife came in and seeing me struggling told me to relax, that I was going to be there for hours and if I did not relax things would not go well for me. I felt patronised, belittled and not listened to. Not long after I asked for an epidural...mainly because I believed I was not coping like the midwife said. There happened to be an anaesthetist on the wards at the time so she immediately came in informed me of the risks and put the epidural in.

Almost immediately I felt I needed to push and then they checked me and I was fully dilated. I absolutely believe of the midwives had listened and realised I was actually in transition and that's why the pain was overwhelming then I could have delivered without an epidural. As it was they let me 'rest' for half an hour before delivering the baby I think because if I had delivered so soon after having an epidural then there would have been questions. They said I would have my baby delivered in 10 minutes. 45 minutes later when I was still pushing I felt like a failure. When her head was finally delivered there was a surprising exclamation as she was posterior. That was never picked up and therefore no adjustments to delivering on my back were made. It felt like they made mistake after mistake simply by not checking or believing me when I was talking about my own body.

My third and last baby was delivered again in _____ hospital in 2013. And this birth was the most traumatic. I was 9 days overdue and again induced via syntocin. A similar thing happened to my second birth. A slow start followed by a very quick labour. Again I had to be fully monitored with the straps constantly on me. The wireless and waterproof monitor wasn't working so again I was basically stuck in the bed.

Not long into the intensity of the labour they were struggling to pick up my baby's heartbeat so they put the probe on the baby's head where they realised his heartbeat was very low. That caused a major emergency with many many midwives and doctors in the room all yelling about emergency caesarean and I was in full intense contractions. It was all chaos and I don't remember much about it. At some point they realised I was 9cm dilated and so they got him out with vacuum. After the birth while still in the full aftermath of the intensity of it all a midwife came in and said: we need to tell you that if you have another baby you need to tell them we did this _____ manoeuvre on you. Basically we flipped your legs over your head

to get your baby out. You'll need to say that. But I had no capacity to understand what they said. I had no memory of what had happened and there was no debrief or clear explanation or anything at a time when I could comprehend what had happened. After the delivery I was in the shower and then bloody fluid started gushing out of me. I was taken back to the bed for monitoring. Every 20mins or so I would have this fresh gush of fluid. I had no idea what was going on. A doctor came in and said we need to scoop out your uterus. That's probably not what he said but that's what he did. It was excruciating after a traumatic quick delivery. He did not ask for consent or explain why.

There was nobody else in the room other than me My husband was off with our baby. It was awful. At one point a midwife came into the room and asked what was going on and she rushed to get me some gas. After that they said I had a 'boggy uterus' and so had to put the syntocin drip back in. Then they had to put a catheter in. Finally after hours and hours they put some suppository medicine in which settles it down. But I felt fairly violated. Also immediately after the delivery when the doctor was stitching me up (only a few stitches' he casually informed me that he'd dealt with something. I don't know what it was. Maybe a polyp or something. But again no information, no consent and no follow up. I honestly cannot believe that things like this can happen to women at an intense and overwhelming time when we don't have the capacity to remember, consent or make informed decisions and things are decided on our behalf and then afterwards we have no access to notes, reports or clear information about what happened to us.

I strongly believe that after all births but especially after any birth with intervention that there needs to be a follow up appointment or debrief with the midwife who was present. A few days after the birth once there's been time to recover and process so that we can ask questions. Things can be explained. And we should be given a record of what happened to us, procedures done, medicine given and there should be a way for us to follow this up if we need it. I am a strong, confident woman, a leader in my field of work. I am self aware and courageous but I felt like a had such little agency in that birthing sweet. I felt beyond myself and had little ability to advocate for myself and nobody else there who could. I was made to feel on several occasions that I didn't know anything, despite being aware of my own body. I didn't feel treated like a person in a vulnerable start. I was a 'case' to be dealt with with as little risk to the hospital as possible.

I wish all my births had been different.

I wish I actually knew what happened to me.

I felt like because I delivered three healthy babies that I could not complain about how they came into this world.

It should be better.