

Submission
No 363

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My name is [REDACTED]. Age 32. I live currently in [REDACTED] NSW. I have a 4 year old son (born 2019), I have had a pregnancy loss (2021) and am now currently 30 weeks pregnant again.

I was pregnant for the first time in 2018/19 with my son. I felt very drawn to have a home birth, but at the time couldn't afford the finance to make it happen. So I was left with the option of birthing at [REDACTED] Hospital. Though it wasn't the home-birth I dreamed of. I was accepted into their MGP program and was well cared for during my pregnancy. During our birth planing chats, I had expressed very clear hopes for a natural birth with no intervention or pain relief.

I spontaneously went into labour at home on the 9th of July 2019. I felt supported and safe at home, but as planned went to hospital once I started to feel like I was in progressing through active labour.

I arrived at 3pm in hospital after labouring at home for around 7 hours. I transitioned into the hospital space well. I was well supported by my husband and doula, and was progressing well and calm. I felt in my power. My waters broke around 5ish in the birthing pool. Around 6pm I felt like things were intensifying, baby was close. After a small mirror observation, the midwife confirmed his head was on show. Though I didn't feel the natural urge to, she instructed me to push with contractions. After 1.5 hours of doing so in the birth pool and no further descending of my baby, the midwife suggested we had to get me out of the water because I had been in there too long - as per hospital policy. She suggested to have a visual assessment of baby and try some other positions. I was guided into a few different positions. But nothing changed. It was confirmed I was fully dilated and baby's head was still in the same position, not transcending down the canal. She tried some manual movements with her hand inside my vagina to assist to turn my baby, but no success. She then advised due to length of time pushing and baby's position, hospital policy required her to call in a doctor in to have me assessed. I was sad and confused to be at a stand still, unsure what more I could do to have the birth I wanted and keep my baby safe. I wasn't in distress and neither was my baby. Yet it felt as though something must be wrong from the procedures/policy my midwife had to follow. Did it need to be in others hands? Could I simply not have just had more time? Done more positions or movements? I started to feel so vulnerable and felt my power slipping away.

The doctor came in around 30 mins after she called for him. Upon assessment he felt it was best for me to go to theatre for a supported vaginal birth and if no success, then a caesarean - my baby seemed stuck, a failure to progress as it states on my discharge notes. It seemed as though there were no other options. I probably should have asked more clear questions, like isn't there more we can do? I feel myself and my husband could have been far more informed/educated on what was seemingly concerning about the situation and what exactly warranted the intervention. But I was deep in labour. I couldn't communicate or think clearly. I began to feel scared of my body birthing my baby, but also scared of the intervention I was about to receive. My husband didn't know what to do. He was so worried. We felt we couldn't

question those who were more educated than me, whom have been alongside many births. This was our first, what were we to know?

From this moment onwards I felt vulnerable and lead. Lead down a path of unwanted intervention. I was told I would have an epidural in preparation for theatre. Unaware there were other options and this wasn't for preparation as such. I had the epidural, then I felt nothing. Disconnected from my baby and labour. I was told not to push. I was teary and emotional, trying to wrap my head the position I was in, grieving the birth I wanted. Feeling scared for my baby whom I was sure would be trying to get out of me.

We then were left for a long time waiting, waiting, waiting to be taken to theatre. We were told there was a life saving bowel surgery going on, and it was taking longer than anticipated. Apparently the hospital couldn't fund another team coming in for my theatre support. So there was a long delay. I felt unimportant. My baby and myself still weren't showing any physical signs of distress. But I felt lost, confused that I was laying there while I was in labour, unable to feel anything. Maybe my baby was still trying to get out? Why couldn't I continue having support to birth my baby while waiting? My midwife was barely with us whilst we were in this limbo. She seemed very focused on trying to get us to theatre and quite concerned on how long it was taking. We felt the angst in the room anytime her or the doctor came in to check on us. They kept raising worry about it taking so long to get us to theatre. We felt alone, confused, let down and very absorbent of their concerning energy.

Hours later, and we were finally told we'd be taken to theatre. We were given the heads up before going that the Obstetrician didn't have a great reputation of bedside manner. Around this time my baby started to show irregular heart rate signs. But I was stressing, surely my baby was feeling it and being impacted by it? This made me feel even more concerned. The OB stashed into the room hastily, complaining he couldn't believe how long it took to get me to theatre and he had been waiting as long as I had. He did a vaginal exam and told me I had no choice, I needed to have a caesarean and walked away. I was shocked and utterly devastated. I asked someone to tell him to come back to talk to me. I said I was told I could have an assisted vaginal birth, then if no success a C-section. He said your baby is showing signs of distress and it has been too long. I was shattered. We then proceeded with the surgery. During which I felt very unsupported by the OB, like I was just another patient, just another C-section he routinely does. My baby safely came out, I could hear him cry. He was taken away to have mucus sucked from his throat. Then my husband brought him over shortly after wrapped in a blanket. The only skin we could connect with was our cheeks. I was overjoyed to meet him, but still going through my surgery - I felt a world of emotions, scared, disconnected, vulnerable. My husband took my baby to recovery where I would meet them.

Shortly after I started to feel some pain, pulling and prodding. I observed many of the theatre staff looking at each other with concerned and disapproving faces. All of a sudden the OB started to worry and was talking very hastily to other staff, requesting they get the bowel surgeon to come in. He was stressed and being quite disrespectful. I had no idea what was going on. But something was! The anaesthetist said to him - 'your patient is right here. You

can let her know about the situation'. Suggesting that he was being rude in not letting me know and speaking over me. Turns out he had put a stitch through my bowel whilst sewing me up. The bowel surgeon came, politely told the OB to calm down and how to deal with the situation. She also conversed with me to assure me all would be okay and I can go be with me baby shortly.

I finally was finished with the surgery and taken to be with my baby and husband. The initial time with them is a foreign blur. The meds had my mind scattered, I felt traumatised after my theatre experience with the care provided by the OB. I felt my choices were taken away from me and I was left physically and emotionally wounded.

We noticed there was a wound on our baby's head after birth. A bruise like spot with a a bloody wound. We wondered was this from surgery or was it some sort of fetal scalp montior that we were unaware of happening during our birth? No one had a straight answer.

Baby seemed to be thriving in the following days. I was feeling exhausted, emotional whilst trying to learn to mother/breastfeed. On the Friday following birth (the day before I was meant to be discharged) I started to have intense pain in my bladder. I was unable to pass urine. Only blood trickles and clots. I was watched over for the following hour by the midwife, as things intensified she called the doctor. He then was concerned and put a catheter in. Which showed only heavy bleeding. No urine. This kept getting blocked. So he had to put a larger catheter in. This felt awfully traumatic. I was in pain already, my whole vaginal area felt sensitive and vulnerable post birth, it was awful.

The following day I had to go in for a surgery on my bladder. They didn't know what exactly would be done. I was prepared for many possible outcomes, a lot that felt very daunting. I had to go under anaesthetic and leave my baby. It all felt so wrong. How did I end up here? I just want to be at home with my baby. But my body was struggling.

I ended up having a systgram, and all seemed to go well. I had to stay in hospital for recovery and was able to go home the following Tuesday.

Finally at home with my baby for a few days. It felt like I could start to breathe and begin my motherhood journey. Though the following Friday I started to have heavy gush of bleeding and haemorrhaging from my uterus. I felt very unwell. We called maternity and they told us to come back. We had to go through emergency with my newborn which was an extremely vulnerable experience. I was kept in for observation for another couple of days, but all started to heal and settle on its own and I went home. I had a very slow recovery post caesarean. I couldn't carry or pick up my baby on my own for weeks. It took a while for my health to pick up.

During our stay at hospital we had several visits from hospital staff whom cared for us in birth and surgery, even some management who had been informed about what happened. Most

apologised for the challenging experiences that had occurred. Saying that my post complications were very unheard of and unusual. Many referred to the wait to get me to theatre as a possible cause for my post complications. There was also a lot of apologies for the stitch in bowel and the poor behaviour from the OB. The OB also came and visited me a few days after birth. He could barely look at me and spent his time blaming all that occurred on the hospital system and taking so long to get me to theatre. He said I was a swollen mess inside and it was hard to work on because my baby had been down low inside me too long.

It was suggested to have an open disclosure meeting with me after my experience. But that never followed through.

I had a very traumatic first birth experience. I felt uninformed at many stages. I felt let down and restricted by hospital policies/procedures and the duty of care and treatment received by certain staff. I felt robbed of the newborn stage with my son as I was unfit physically to care for him properly on my own for weeks when in healing. I feel the ever present emotional affects and grief of birth trauma. I too feel my son carries his form of trauma from the experience, one that he could never voice. I plan to stay as far away from the hospital system as I can for my upcoming birth. Hoping to have a home birth VBAC on my terms.

Some things I would have loved or suggest -

Financial support for a home births.

Further training around clear and supportive language and education used to gain consent or make decisions with birthing families.

Birth trauma prevention and post treatment training should be a part of education for all staff.