

Submission
No 367

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my first and only child in 2021, I was 32 at the time.

I was admitted to [REDACTED] Hospital for the birth as I was an outpatient and had received all of my antenatal care there, unfortunately not through the Midwives Group Practice. My wish was to receive care under the MGP, but I was told due to an ovarian cyst and a low platelet count (ITP) that I was not eligible.

On June 23rd 2021, 2 days before my due date, my water broke at around 3am and contractions began. At 6am I contacted the maternity ward and advised that I had been contracting and that I thought my water had broken, I was told to come in when I was ready and they would confirm this for me. I arrived by 8-8:30am and my contractions by this point had tapered off. I was seen by a midwife and it was confirmed my water had broken. A doctor, who I believe was a registrar, was then brought into the room who advised that I would need to be induced asap, without any explanation as to why that decision had been made without my knowledge or consent. This doctor's tone then changed from warm and friendly to short and condescending when I questioned why an induction was necessary. When she said it was due to an increased risk of bleeding during labour, I explained that I've never had any issues with bleeding or haemorrhage and she patted me on the leg in a condescending manner and dismissed me by saying "you've never laboured before, dear". I acknowledged that to be true, but that I was referring to the fact that I had consulted with multiple doctors, a haematologist and an anaesthetist from the hospital during my pregnancy who all confirmed that I was not at high risk of bleeding and that not one of these people ever indicated that I would need to have an induction due to ITP.

I declined having an induction, instead opting to wait 24 hours for my labour to progress naturally and to monitor bleeding at home. I was told I'd need to sign a waiver to do this, and the doctor was very hostile in her manner and the way she communicated as she gave me the waiver to sign. I felt as though she was personally offended by my decision to question her medical opinion and that she was acting out on this, particularly when she told me "your induction has been booked for tomorrow morning at 9:30" in a spiteful tone.

My contractions returned later that afternoon around 5pm and continued strongly and regularly throughout the night, but unfortunately began to taper off again as the clock ticked nearer to that 9:30am mark. I believe this ordeal with the doctor affected my ability to naturally go into labour due to the anxiety it created.

Reluctantly I made my way back to the hospital and was hooked up to the syntocinon and thus began the most painful and terrifying experience of my life. I was terrified of each coming contraction as the pain was beyond excruciating and in no way natural. I was too scared to move off the bed and didn't do so apart from the beginning of the induction. I managed to drift off to sleep in between contractions once and was woken by the pain so was absolutely terrified to fall back to sleep and fought against doing so to the point where my eyes were rolling to the back of my head but my fear would not allow my body to rest. I was in a highly anxious state and it was never how I pictured to birth. During the pushing stage, I was told by

the midwives that they'd need to cut me as I was going to tear. I consented to this thinking I'd be given a local anaesthetic but I wasn't, I was just cut and the pain was incredibly intense. As the pushing phase was dragging on (1.5 hours in total) one of the midwives kept making comments that the doctor has been popping their head in to check and that they were hanging around outside and that if I can't get my baby out soon then they will need to intervene, which is not something I wanted to hear as it made me feel rushed and anxious. My son was then born by 7pm.

I struggled to breast feed my son and stayed in hospital for 4 days post birth in order to see the lactation consultant on the Monday when they were back in, only to be told on Monday morning they she had called in sick. So off home I was sent without a plan to feed my baby, feeling confused and terrified. Of course it didn't help that I was told by one midwife that I had "difficult nipples" and that I needed to give my baby formula the night he was born because he was "starving", after asking her to help me hand express and her trying and giving up after a 10 second attempt.

I managed to get the hang of breastfeeding after a few weeks thanks to a private LC who I had to pay to see as I was told the LC at the hospital was too busy to see me. I'm incredibly lucky that I had the funds to pay for this service, because so many people aren't.

I still to this day carry a lot of fear about having an induction in the future, and it took me at least 18 months to even consider having another baby. I also fear that if I did try to get accepted into MGP, I would be declined again and that I would receive the same model of care that I received in my first pregnancy which felt incredibly impersonal having seen a different midwife at each appointment and having a complete stranger deliver my baby. Not to mention the total lack of continuity of care that I received afterwards - I had no midwife visit or follow up as I had moved house into a different health district a month before giving birth and was denied any care from my local hospital. Instead I reached out to my local Child and Family Health Centre for support.