

Submission
No 369

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

My experience was very mild compared to so many others, but the lack of information provided by my OB and consideration for my mental health throughout the pregnancy and birth has made me incredibly worried and nervous about falling pregnant again.

My OB was recommended to me by several friends who had all had positive experiences. At first I found her incredibly warm and helpful. At our first appointment, I told her that I suffered from anxiety and OCD, was incredibly nervous about being pregnant and was meeting regularly with my psychologist. But despite it being my first pregnancy, my appointments were rushed (sometimes 5 minutes) and I found that she didn't provide me with much information about the various stages of pregnancy. I almost felt that I was too boring a patient as my pregnancy was very low risk. However, during my appointments, my desire to discuss my birth plan was dismissed ("only public hospitals need birth plans"), my fears about a vaginal birth and desire to have an elective c section was ignored and despite low iron levels throughout my pregnancy, I wasn't referred for an infusion. 3 months after giving birth and suffering immense exhaustion and heart palpitations, my GP ran several blood tests and told me that I was severely anemic. (She couldn't believe that my OB hadn't referred me to an infusion when this OB had done so for friends of mine when they were pregnant). She also didn't take into consideration that I was in my late 30's and it was my first child. When it came to my stretch and sweep she didn't explain why she was doing it, didn't really verbally ask for my consent and I didn't feel comfortable enough to say that I didn't want it.

I was induced at 40 weeks, checking into the hospital the night before and being given Cervidil tape. My OB didn't bother visiting me the morning I was induced despite telling me that she would and didn't come until I was ready to push in the afternoon. I felt abandoned by her, especially as she knew that I was highly anxious about giving birth. I progressed very quickly and at 10am the midwives asked me if I wanted the epidural. The epidural failed twice, yet when I tried to tell the midwives through the pain why I suspected it wasn't working (damaged nerves around my stomach/bottom from a previous surgery), I was ignored. The pain radiated through my privates for about 6 hours with contractions coming every 30 seconds. I had never felt such pain in my life. But no one told me why I had to wait. I had a warm midwife in the morning who sadly finished her shift at lunchtime, and was replaced by a pushy older midwife who had told me once or twice to stop screaming so hard and to breath better. All I had was gas. I wasn't assured and helped to get into other positions and at times it was just my husband and I in the room.

When it came to push, the stirrups were broken and I was told to put my legs in them (no other way of pushing was provided). My poor husband had to hold the stirrups up for an hour while I pushed.

My son was 4kg, and was much larger than the scans or my OB had told me. I was told at 32 weeks that he was 58th percentile, but he was in fact 88th and incredibly painful to push. My OB never referred me for a 38 week scan (which other friends who went private had been offered) which would have told her that I was pushing a big baby.

After I had pushed my son out and delivered the placenta, my OB just started stitching without telling me what she was doing. I later discovered via my husband that I had tearing and that she had also done an episiotomy without my consent. I never did find out what degree tearing I had. She also upset me when she triumphantly declared after I had pushed out my son "See! I knew you could deliver vaginally. And you wanted a C section!"

In hospital, I wasn't taught how to breastfeed until the 3rd day, when a lactation consultant pushed my screaming son into my breast. He was traumatised and so was I. To the credit of the hospital, the young nurses were amazing, though some of the bossy older ones were not as great. It didn't matter anyway, my milk supply was so slow and never really came, which I believe was as a result of my anxiety and the birth.

Even when I had my 6 week checkup I was rushed though. She never checked me physically, didn't discuss anything related to the birth. By that stage I was so exhausted and anxious from being in the hospital again that I felt I couldn't ask "what degree tearing did I have?" "Did the hospital even care why the epidural didn't work?"

I feel that for the money I paid, I should have been provided more a more empathetic and informative birth. I didn't learn about hypnobirth or perineal massages from my OB. I'm still terrified at the thought of getting pregnant and giving birth again, and plan to try and get into the midwifery program or GP shared care. I have a pregnant friend who is currently in the midwifery program and at her first appointment with the midwife she was told all hypnobirthing and perineal massages! While not as traumatic as many other births, I still wanted to offer my story to the commission so that women's fears and anxieties can be considered with more care and compassion prior to birth.