

Submission
No 380

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

When pregnant with my first child I was under the care of the midwifery group. This was supposed to be the epitome of continuous care. My midwives changed constantly and while they were lovely and personable, I could not say that any of them actually helped me to prepare for childbirth at all. They did not discuss things freely with me, made sure I understood the different processes and options I had. I went very blindly into it knowing only to call the hospital if I think something is wrong.

When my waters broke with meconium in the fluid I did as directed and went straight to the hospital where I was induced. In the process I had many painful examinations, and my baby was being head pricked very regularly. It was very invasive and yet I had no idea that I could actually say no at any point during the whole thing. Being at a student-led hospital I had so many people in the room with me. It was too many. I fully support students getting the education and experience they need but by the time I was actually birthing my baby post epidural I had 9 extra people in the room, standing across from me staring and watching and waiting. How could anyone feel comfortable in that moment? The entire birthing I felt powerless, like it was all happening TO ME, instead of being in control. People didn't ask to touch me, no-one tried to encourage me to help myself or to relieve pain with alternative methods. Once my baby was born he was taken straight to the pediatricians to have his lungs checked for fluids. While I could see the doctors, I couldn't see my baby. What was happening? Was he ok? Noone was telling me anything. Everyone else seemed more concerned about the placenta removal and I was just to assume everything was ok? After a couple of minutes of him on my chest they whisked my baby away to the nursery. My husband went with him but there was no option for skin on skin, breastfeeding, anything? I just sat there in pools of my own blood while the midwives mopped up and I tried to work out what had just happened to me? Eventually I was put in the shower, changed and taken down to him. But why could he not have stayed with me? Why could I not have had some proper time with him?

The impacts of my birth trauma have been vast. I tried to get counseling but couldn't afford it. It massively affected my relationship with my husband, especially sexually. It still does almost 6 years later.

When I got pregnant again, after a 4.5 year gap, I was terrified. I cried for almost all of my pregnancy out of fear of birthing again. I paid a lot of money at a time of great financial stress to get some birth coaching and learn about the process of birth and ways I could feel empowered to birth. Hypnobirthing was fantastic and really changed how I felt in my second birth, despite again, having terrible circumstances. If we could have afforded it, both my husband and I would've individually liked to have some psychiatric care/sessions to help us overcome our previous trauma. My husband also had his own trauma from our sons birth. I believe partner trauma is almost never acknowledged, and after speaking to many other Fathers, most of them carry their own trauma as well, albeit usually hidden because noone talks about it.

For my second birth (2022) I had some faint bleeding and called the hospital to let them know. They made me come in for an examination, and told me I would need to be indeed that day.

They told me that because I was covid positive I could not birth at that hospital as the ward was “too busy” and they had “no senior doctors on Sundays”.

Despite both me and my baby being completely fine, I was not allowed to go home, gather my things, or have my husband come with me. I was taken unnecessarily by ambulance to another hospital an hour away ([REDACTED] to [REDACTED]).

When I arrived, the hospital was brand new and quite lovely, but I was hurried into an allocated birth suite for Covid positive patients and told not to come out under any circumstances. I was in lock down alone. Shortly after, a nurse came in and took my blood pressure. She said that someone would come and see me and they would monitor me to see how I was going. I waited several hours, and yet NO-ONE CAME. I was very tired from Covid, hungry and waiting to find out whether I would be induced, whether my husband could come, WHETHER MY BABY WAS OK. No-one monitored me, gave me updates, nothing.

After a few hours I began to feel my contractions come at more consistent intervals. I called a midwife in to let her know I had gone into natural labour. She stood at the door across the room and yelled back to me that 6 minutes apart didn't count as active labour, and left me alone again. Despite being in a hospital birth suite, and being sick with covid, I wasn't being cared for. I questioned whether I really was in labour! I truly feel that the midwives were far too busy and that no-one wanted to get into the PPE to come into my room.

Meanwhile my surges progressed. I called my husband and told him to come anyway, despite not knowing what was happening or whether he was allowed as he was also covid positive.

My contractions progressed quickly and by the time my husband was ushered into the room by another midwife she couldn't refute that I was in active labour. I quickly birthed my baby only an hour and a half after he arrived.

Hours later the midwife apologised that I had been left alone to fend for myself, with no coeliac friendly food available or any staff to care for me. She said they were very busy that day. I believe they were completely understaffed.

The next several days we stayed at the hospital in an allocated covid positive room. Unfortunately we were unable to leave the room. We were very often overlooked by staff, often having meals brought to us hours later, if at all. Luckily for us we had already had a baby, and knew how to keep one alive because the level of neglect we received in the following days was ridiculous. We spoke often about how terrifying it would have been if that had have been our first child, or if we had had any complications with me, the baby or breastfeeding.

Not once, in the 4 days we were there did anyone ask us if we, two covid positive people, were ok. IN A HOSPITAL.