

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Hi my name is _____ and I gave birth to my first child on the 9 March 2021.

While my experience through pregnancy, birth and post was not all bad, there were definitely times that were traumatic for myself. I hope that my story can give a comparison on some of the areas that are working well and not so well, so that the gaps in care are clearly seen and can then be worked on.

My first negative experience was my first appointment with the midwife. I didn't take my partner thinking that it would just be some information and there wouldn't be much point of him being there and I knew he would have to sit out for some of the mental health questions.

The midwife I felt was quite cold and not comforting. She asked quite a few questions which was fine and then we got onto the mental health stuff, I grew up in a DV family so there was some stuff that was quite confronting obviously bringing up past situations and the midwife just gave me a bunch of pamphlets to call if I need anything. After this the amount of information was overloaded and I felt extremely overwhelmed. We then got on to the topic of immunisations, I said I hadn't had the flu vaccination and didn't really want to. She started giving me the statistics around the harm to my baby and was quite forceful telling me that I HAD to get it. Anyway, when I got out of the hospital I called my partner in hysterics, I thought I had already failed my baby and that I was a bad mother for not getting the flu vaccination. I couldn't remember a thing that was said to me and I'd come out with a whole bag of pamphlets and a bunch of appointments. I second guessed my educated decision on not getting the flu vaccination.

In comparison, I ended up on caseload or similar where I had a trainee midwife sit in on my appointments. These appointments were nothing like that first, I felt supported and I felt comfortable to explain what I did and didn't want to do and I started to feel empowered and in control as the appointments progressed. One midwife explained to me that she didn't get the flu vaccination while pregnant and that it was totally up to me to make an informed decision based on the information provided to me. These moments were pivoting, giving women control and empowering them is the most crucial part I think for preparing a women for birth.

My birth started out fine, my baby was on my back so the pain was excruciating however I had a midwife and my trainee midwife both explaining the options available to me. I worked out quickly what didn't and did work for me. I took a heat pack even though I know this apparently isn't allowed. The midwives allowed me to use it as long as my partner was the one heating it up so they weren't liable. If I didn't have that heat pack it would have severely impacted how I coped with birthing. The heat packs at the hospital were horrible and did absolutely nothing for me.

I had been in labour for sometime in the bath at the hospital, they got me out for a check on the bed and realised that my son had pooped in my waters. From there I was not able to continue labour in the bath which was my safe place and where I felt I was no longer in control. I was placed on the bed and things slowed down, I had been stuck at 8cm dilated for some time and check ups were getting closer together. I could tell if things didn't change I would be looking at an emergency c-section so I said at one point just give me an epidural. I had gone without any drugs up until and getting the epidural was horrible, the whole feeling was scary and horrible. My epidural didn't work and eventually the doctor came in and said that my son was stuck and that it was best that we go for an emergency c-section. By then I was tired and felt out of control, I was uncomfortable on the bed and agreed.

This is where things got a little traumatic for me. We were getting set up for the c-section, they were at the point of checking whether I could feel a cold glove against me. I could feel everything which is when they realised the epidural hadn't worked. They then told me that I would have to go under, this moment for me was extremely terrifying, I refused and said that I didn't want that. They continued that that was the only option due to the timing of the epidural being so close. At that point another woman came in, clearly in a much more intense situation than myself. Everyone left the room except for the anaesthetist, he was really lovely. He gave me gas for my pain and explained that we may be able to do a spinal tap. He was distracting me too as I could tell that something bad was happening in the other room. That was also quite distressing but I did everything I could to ignore the situation in front of me too as I knew if I didn't I wouldn't cope with what was ahead.

Eventually everyone came back in the room and I had the spinal injection and things were ready to go ahead with c-section. I couldn't feel a thing and that was really scary for me, I kept moving my fingers the whole time to make sure I was ok. The surgical team were amazing and set up music which really helped the whole situation and I felt excited for the arrival of my baby. When he arrived I felt so happy, it was easier to ignore what was happening around me. Then he left with my partner and I was moved onto another bed to go to recovery that feeling alone of being naked and moved onto a bed while everyone was gentle and respectful it still felt out of body and I felt like maybe I was dead or maybe I wouldn't feel my body again.

In the recovery the nurse didn't speak to me, I sat there shaking and I was scared. I asked her if it was normal for me to shake this much and she simply said yes. I didn't feel reassured and I was just waiting to feel something again. I eventually was taken up to my room and reunited with my partner and baby. This was nice but it was extremely overwhelming, I was tired and felt like I hadn't slept in so long except there was no way I could sleep.

I was only with my son for a short time from memory it was about 6 hours, my partner had just left and I had called a midwife because he kept taking off his blanket he was wrapped in. I hadn't been able to wrap him yet as I hadn't got up since the C-section and I couldn't feel my legs for some time. I still had a catheter in too. My student midwife came in and checked his breathing, she was really calm and let me know she was grabbing another midwife just to check the count. The midwife came in checked his breathing and not like the student midwife

ran out quite distressed with him. The student midwife said she would be in shortly to explain, I thought I would panic but instead I just sat staring at the wall, I felt delirious and like it wasn't even real, I was entirely desensitised and numb.

She came back in, explained that they had to call a blue light (medical emergency) because he wasn't breathing properly. I called my partner and at the same time he was taken down to NICU. I still hadn't got up yet and was told I needed to get up and shower and wee before I could head down. My partner had arrived and gone directly to NICU while I waited for him to come back up and shower me. I felt like I was really lucky in these moments to have my student midwife as she really prioritised getting me down there. No one else came in to help out.

Heading into NICU was extremely overwhelming, but I calmed myself down knowing that my boy was in the best care possible and that he looked much healthier than the other babies there. When arriving back up I was given endone for pain relief, I asked for panadein forte but was refused as apparently endone works better. They made me feel stupid but I knew that endone side affects were really bad for me and so I ended up with panadol and nurofen.

I couldn't sleep that night it had been 35+hrs since I had slept after a 16hr labour. I was paranoid which was an extremely unfamiliar feeling to me and I was adamant that if I went to sleep that I wouldn't wake up. I tried for hours to get to sleep prior I had been up and down to see and feed █████ in NICU. I had to wait each time to get a midwife to call to get me transported with a wheelchair. I knew that I had to feed him every 3hrs and that it roughly took 1hr to get a wheelchair. I think knowing that I'd only have 1-2hrs sleep before I had to wake again threw me off and made sleeping feel impossible.

I eventually called for a midwife and thankfully I had the most amazing lady come in to see me. I was really honest about how I was feeling knowing that I'd probably sound crazy but I just need someone to tell me I was ok and that I wasn't going to die. I felt like I had already failed my baby by not feeling like I could go down there knowing that I need at least a few more hours sleep. She was so amazing and asked if she could hug me, it was truly all I need in that moment and I am forever grateful that I had her there that night because if it was anyone else I know it could have been a different outcome.

I ended up getting to sleep and when I woke I got a wheelchair and went downstairs to feed █████. After that trip I walked down on my own each time, I could hardly walk but knew that I couldn't keep waiting on a wheelchair every time he needed a feed which was every few hours which means I'd only ever be back in the room for a short period.

█████ Hospital took me seriously and I had people including my surgeon to come and visit me to start some debrief on my birth. I also had a psychologist come in and ask me a bunch

of questions, once I had slept it was clear that it was the lack of sleep and drugs playing with me.

The scar was terrifying to look at and extremely traumatic for me, the whole process after the c-section like massaging the scar, injecting myself for 7 days after and the risk of having a blood clot was really stressful and made me extremely anxious. I couldn't wait for the 7 days to be over too. There was no information at all about recovery after a c-section, and little information in general. Feeling my body being pulled in different directions so roughly during my c-section was another thing that haunted me. This and the fact that my labour "failure to progress" was so dis-empowering, I remember telling my partner that the world failure was so triggering for me. I felt like I had failed, I felt like I failed my body, my partner and my baby. I felt I should have pushed harder to go naturally.

At one point I had bled on my compression socks and asked for new ones. The midwife I had was extremely rude and made me feel disgusting and horrible and told me that they only ever give out one pair of socks so I had to walk around in blood stained socks for the rest of my stay.

I ended up seeking a debrief and had a conversation with someone a few months later when I was in a better headspace. It helped a bit but overall talking to people feeling similar is what helped the most.

Overall I feel like there were good and bad moments in my labour. I felt supported by most and unsupported by few. Re-writing my story in parts is triggering and still brings tears to my eyes. While I have heard many worse stories than mine I feel like my story is important in understanding the types of things that can happen during pre and post-natal care and that women are so extremely important in these moments. If they aren't treated well it can severely impact us for the rest of our lives.

Since having my son, I have spent \$1000's seeing a women's physiotherapist which I am still working with 2 and a half years on to get my pelvic floor corrected. My back has been in severe pain and I have had pain during sex still to this day.

Women need to be invested in, we are the only sex that can re-produce but we aren't treated in a way that makes us feel empowered to make decisions during this time. The care before and after of our bodies are so important especially when we might continue wanting to make a family. I shouldn't come out of having a baby and never feeling the same. Gender based violence needs to be taken seriously and data needs to be collected on other intersectionality's of oppressions that women experience while pregnant and how that effects their outcomes in the health system. The fact that some women can't go back to their normal lives after birth is unacceptable and the fact that women are coerced and treated horribly in labour needs to be investigated.