

Submission
No 382

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

To the Select Committee on Birth Trauma

I would like to share my personal experience of birth trauma with the committee and the causes and factors that contributed to my experience.

I gave birth at [REDACTED] Private Hospital in [REDACTED] NSW in November 2020

The birth of my child did not go as I expected and was ultimately traumatic.

During the birth of my baby I experienced a lack of informed consent and a lack of information around what happened to myself and my baby during my birth. Both these factors contributed to the birth trauma I subsequently experienced.

There are three particular instances I'd like to share with the committee.

1. During my birth it was believed that my daughter became stuck in my pelvis. After nearly 2 hours of attempting to deliver, it was decided that the best way forward was to use the Ventouse and perform an episiotomy. At this stage there was no suggestion that my baby required urgent medical attention. I recall saying "just do anything to get her out" to my Obstetrician, I believe he took this to be my valid and informed consent. However, I was never told the risks of an episiotomy and the ongoing impacts it may have on my pelvic floor. I do not believe that I gave informed consent for this procedure to occur.

2. When my baby was delivered she was not born breathing, after attempting to stimulate her at the bedside she required to be moved to the Resus table. During this period I repeatedly asked my obstetrician why my baby was not breathing and what were they doing to her. Every time I was told to relax and that she required help. I was unable to move due to my epidural and having my perineal tears repaired. I could not see my baby or see what they were doing to her. To this day I still do not know what happened to my baby or why she was separated from after birth other than that "she required help" The incident was not recorded anywhere on my discharge summary. At my 6 week check my Obstetrician told me that "we came very close to an emergency" but did not elaborate as to what happened with my baby.

3. Immediately after my birth I had a small postpartum haemorrhage, neither the midwife involved in my care nor my obstetrician told me that I had haemorrhaged. After the birth I was so exhausted I was unable to look at my baby or hold her for long. I had to pass her back to my husband. I didn't understand why I felt this way and subsequently experienced a great deal of guilt that I could not hold my baby. At my 6 week check up with my GP she alerted me to the fact that I had lost a lot of blood during my daughter's birth and that I had haemorrhaged. I started to understand why I couldn't hold or support my baby after my birth.

The way I was treated has led to birth trauma which has impacted my mental and physical health and my willingness to have more children. For 6 months following the birth I had private Physio consultations to address the physical trauma to my pelvic floor from my episiotomy- For 10 weeks after my Daughters birth I was unable to sit down comfortably. For the 6 months following her birth I experienced daily pelvic pain. I still deal with the ongoing physical impacts from a muscular knot that exists in my pelvic floor from the way my episiotomy was stitched. I was a very active person before having children and having to reduce my physical activity greatly after her birth really impacted my mental health. I was terrified to have more children as I was worried about further impacts on my physical health.

At 4 months postpartum I realised that I was suffering from Birth Trauma and related anxiety around the safety of my daughter. For 6 months I sought the care of a private psychologist to assist with this.

I have also experienced additional financial costs associated with receiving care from both a private Physio and private psychologist. Limited public services meant that in order to be treated in a timely manner I had to seek out and pay for the services of private practitioners. I was fortunate to be able to afford this care, But for many women this is not the case and so their physical and mental health issues from birth are left untreated.

I would like to recommend that changes be made to consent procedures in birth to ensure that informed consent always happens. I would like to see increased funding for MGP programs so that high risk women can also receive this care. I would like to see postpartum services to be included in routine care and properly covered by medicare so that all women can receive these services.