

Submission
No 388

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

As a Student Midwife I witnessed the mistreatment of a woman giving birth.

I was on my first placement to a rural [REDACTED] NSW hospital, when an Aboriginal woman was brought in via ambulance in active labour.

The night staff told me to go and sit with her which I did. I had no idea what I was meant to do, this was the first time I'd had anything to do with a labouring woman apart from my own births.

She was visibly distressed but not offered any pain relief. The midwives were just chatting at the nurses station. When the woman said she felt like pushing I went out and told the midwives and they did nothing, just continued talking. It was not until her sister came to the door and looked at me raising her hands in a gesture that said "what are you doing?" , that the midwives moved to help her.

The baby was born very soon after going into the room.

Baby was placed on mum's chest and we waited for the placenta to be birthed. It was taking longer than the doctor expected although it was only about thirty minutes.

The doctor said to the woman she needed to get the placenta out or they would need to go to theatre. Then with no anaesthetic and absolutely no explanation of what she was going to do, the doctor put her whole hand inside the woman's vagina to retrieve the placenta. The woman was screaming in pain. I was completely shocked and horrified that this seemed to be stand procedure and that none of the health professionals in the room seemed concerned. No-one attempted to comfort the woman or offer any explanation afterwards.

I felt angry and upset at witnessing such blatant racism and disrespect for another human being. I say racism because I witnessed those same midwives treat a white woman the next night with much more respect and kindness.

At a large tertiary hospital in my final year as a student I witnessed a woman being threatened to be held down by security in labour if she didn't calm down. She was distressed because the midwife wouldn't let her get in a position that was comfortable to push in and she had a cramp in her leg. I tried to advocate for her and suggested a different position but the midwife said she had to be in stirrups.

The lady had an epidural in place but had good movement of her legs. She kept trying to get up to stretch out her hips. She became more and more distressed and the supervising midwife called the team leader who told the woman "if you don't stop trying to get up we'll have the security guard hold you down.

From the way she so easily stated this I felt it may have happened before.

The woman's husband was visible upset and yelling at her to stay still. Eventually and suddenly the woman stood up on the bed while it was at hip height. She instantly came ones down, the collapsed on the bed and was taken to theatre for a forceps assisted birth as she was almost non responsive.

I was very upset afterward. I cried while discussing with my preceptor. I felt this all could have avoided if the midwife had listened to the woman and myself and helped her into a better birthing position.

I have witnessed a woman undergoing induction of labour, which failed and she was sent home. She had a very extensive history of sexual assault by several people over her young life. The staff at this hospital were aware of her history but she was subjected to multiple vaginal examinations by different people over the course of three days. And she was sent home to "wait a bit longer" because the cervical ripening was not working for her. This was during my second year of training and I was only present for the discussion at the end when the male doctors stood around her to tell her she could go home.

These incidents have helped shape me as a midwife but I will not ever forget how I felt as a witness to this abuse and can only guess how these women felt receiving this treatment.