

Submission
No 390

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

This is incredibly hard to write, especially newly postpartum with my third baby. I have never been more triggered by my traumatic experience from my first birth than I have since having my 3rd baby.

Here is my story:

From the moment I first thought about having a baby, the plan was always to have a natural vaginal birth. This was incredibly important to me; it is a huge part of my values. So, what eventuated was not only traumatic in the sense of what happened, it was traumatic as it rattled me to my core. How could something I wanted so badly go so astray? how could I come to the realisation that my totally capable body "failed"? how did this not work? How can it go so wrong? Why are people acting like it is so normal and okay? Well, the answer is: obstetricians meddling to suit their own agendas and nurses engaging in malpractice.

On the evening of the 24th of February 2019, I went into labour. The plan was to have a natural, drug free vagina birth. I arrived at the hospital at 5cm dilated. From the moment I stepped into the birthing ward I received the utmost amazing care from the midwives on the birthing ward. I was experiencing a posterior labour with no breaks; it had been a lot of exhausting work. I had some minor issues: dilating to 9cm, swelling back up to 6cm to then being told my ONLY option at a natural birth was syntocin and an epidural (I now know this was not my only option and this was a blatant lie, why!?). After 1.5 hours I was 9 cm again, but I was told things had stopped progressing, and that whilst my baby was in no distress at all, I would need a c section. They stated they could not continue the syntocin anymore as they were worried my uterus would be tired and could rupture, this information was determined by what?

I was exhausted from a 25-hour labour and absolutely devastated that my hopes and dreams of a natural birth had been shattered. coming so far, going through so much pain to end up exactly where I did not want to be. as far away from my hopes one could imagine. That alone was a horrendous place to be, a place that in hindsight, I never needed to be in. There was a lack of education on my part and a huge amount of cohesion and manipulation on the hospitals part. Including my request not to receive antibiotics for the c section, where I was told 'you have to, you can't decline them for this' another blatant lie. This left me feeling like I had zero control over what was happening to me, no say, no control. However, I still had the reassurance that one thing from my birth hopes was going to be fulfilled, kangaroo care, having the golden hour with my baby, at least I was going to get that, so I thought...

The staff in the operating room where friendly, kind and supportive. They helped me stay calm and relaxed in a situation I would have given anything to avoid however, from here my nightmare turns traumatic.

The midwife had worked tirelessly before the surgery to ensure after everything I had been through, arranged so she could be present to provide the golden hour to me and have my baby with me in recovery. She had managed to get herself cover on the ward after my c section so that I would not have to be separated from my baby at all. Unfortunately, after 45 minutes she had to leave, not from her lack of trying. The only reason: not enough staff to cover the birthing unit. This is not good enough! considering the lifelong impacts something like this has on a mother and her baby.

With all the research and evidence about how important kangaroo care is, how can you justify, in any way that a mother misses out on this? It is a gross injustice to any mother and her child.

My precious child was forced to wait 2 hours to have her first feed. Can you imagine for a second, entering the world like that, only to then scream for 2 hours and not be fed because you are separated from the one and only person you know!?

Can you even being to imagine the stress response on a tiny little human's nervous system experiencing that? Well, I can, because I lived the life of mothering a baby who was forced to be so dysregulated, so early in life, for so long. I have witnessed the very real consequences that has on a child. I live the life of a mother still witnessing moments that her 4-year-old occasionally re-experiences this. And why 2 hours separation you ask? Well, it gets worse.

I was taken to recovery where I unfortunately encountered my first horrible staff member, and she certainly made it the most traumatic experience imaginable. To this day I still have nightmares about it, I am kept up at night unable to move past her manner and questioning her ethics.

I was told I needed three blood pressure readings that were good.

I understandably was stressed, anxious, upset and concerned that I had been separated from my baby. This is what happens you don't provide enough staff, you have scared patients, terrified new mothers longing for their babies. I had asked how long it would be? How long between each reading?

Where my mum was? as I had asked her to be with me in recovery? When would this end? Her response wasn't an answer to any question. It was a very calculated, callous statement "I don't keep Mother's from their babies" with a smirk on her face, she single handily did exactly that. I can't imagine how many times this staff member has done this before and will do it again.

During all of this I knew my mum had requested to come in as another nurse asked the nurse 'looking after' me to come to the door. She huffed angrily, I later found out that she told my mum "She is still in theatre" she blatantly lied to my mum, why?

Where was my support? what was she going to achieve by not letting her be with me? None of this makes sense. Meanwhile, my baby is continuing to scream for me, for food and I am being held against my will in recovery, with no one to tell I needed help, no one to get me needed away from this lady.

Fast forward and she had obtained the 3 readings she needed to take me back to my baby. However, this is not what happened. Instead, she told me "I just need to do my notes and then I will get the wardman, I'm old so it takes me awhile". Is this for real? HOW is this okay? HOW on earth does someone prioritise notes over reuniting a new mother with her baby?

It took her 30 minutes to do her notes, another 30 unnecessary minutes apart from my baby. My precious child left to scream helplessly for another 30 minutes.

I am a school counsellor and whole heartedly understand the importance of notes and completing them in a timely manner.

HOWEVER, there is a time and place for notes, and this left me full of anger, sadness, and utter helplessness. helpless to do anything, I had no movement in my legs, there was no one else around, I had no ability to ask for help or take myself to my baby.

As she was wheeling me out, she said "because your numb they won't let you have your baby tonight they will keep it in the nursery". Had this lady not already traumatised me enough? This comment shocked me to my core, I was distraught, sacred and full of rage, how could they keep me from my baby? Why had she kept me for so long? My baby has not even been fed yet!!

I arrive at the ward and thankfully I was met with amazing staff. I asked the nurse and she said reassures me "absolutely not, we don't keep babies in the nursery unless absolutely necessary."

I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that this recovery nurse knew this was not going to be the case and made these comments just to elicit more fear and angst in someone who was clearly already so distressed.

I assume, like counselling one of the code of ethics for nursing is nonmaleficence- do no harm?

Well, this nurse has well and truly in breach of that code. She has caused a significant amount of psychological damage.

In 2021 I attempted a vba2c. This sadly and again, unnecessarily ended in another 'emergency' c section partly, and I believe mostly due to obstetricians more concerned about scheduling their evenings instead of supporting women's birth choices. Before the c section, I stated I needed voltaren as pain relief post operation. Having had two previous surgeries in my life, one being the first c section. I knew that this is the only effective pain management for my body. Post-surgery in recovery I mentioned it again.

Once back on the ward, with the epidural worn off, my husband having to leave due to visiting hours. I was left in immense pain. I continued to buzz nurses over and over all night long, all of which told me they could not give Me voltaren as the Dr hadn't signed off on it yet and I hadn't eaten. I pleaded with nurses that I had eaten and I had more food in my bag I would happily eat to be given some voltaren, a drug a can literally purchase from the chemist myself. I was continually denied this and offered endone, morphine, Panadol and nurofen, all of which did absolutely nothing for the pain.

Finally, the morning rolled around, and I was finally given some voltaren after breakfast and I finally experienced relief. A horrific night etched forever in my memory of excruciating pain, trying to tend to a baby whilst helplessly withering in pain, every minute feeling like hours.

These 2 experiences led me to take matters into my own hands for my 3rd birth.

Feeling like I had been left with very few options I sought the support of a hospital 2 hours away [REDACTED]. This hospital was very supportive despite [REDACTED]'s unnecessary opinion that I was not to attempt a vba2c (for not good reason).

Whilst I knew I had found a supportive hospital, the trauma experienced runs too deep, I have zero trust in the hospital to keep birthing women safe. So, my plan was always to have my third baby in a hotel close by the hospital, in case an emergency arose, in a place I knew I could keep myself and my baby SAFE.

Initially I attempted to find a homebirth midwife, but they are few and far between of ones that support vba2c. Instead, I planned a freebirth, free of any unnecessary medical intervention that has only previously sought to ruin my birth experiences. My free birth was incredible and everything I had dreamed of.

Whilst my free birth experience was amazing, I am left with ongoing trauma, that I feel was ripped wide open again when I was faced with the absolute reality of what my babies and I missed out on for my first 2 births. 4 years on and tears will flow when I think of my experiences for too long.

My children will have forever to live with that as their entry into the world and the trauma and consequences that come with birth via a c section for a baby, unnecessary c sections at that.

I would like to see a review into the staffing numbers. No mother should ever miss out on this critical time (golden hour). It is an enormous injustice to Mothers and babies delivering via c section at [REDACTED] hospital. We know too much about the benefits of this time to ever take this opportunity away from someone due to numbers.

I would also like to see a standard of care for mothers in recovery, that if separation is needed that it is as short as humanly possible, and if this exists already that this information is circulated to pregnant women so they know their rights and never have to feel like they are being held captive, away from their baby.

I would like to see hospitals held responsible for blatant lies, cohesion, and manipulation of birthing women. I would like to see obstetricians who care more about scheduling their evenings nicely than mothers and babies, receive more education on the very real consequences this has on mothers and babies.