

Submission  
No 392

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I was admitted to hospital after being diagnosed with Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG), I was dehydrated and unable to eat or drink and I was 9 weeks pregnant. I had a one week hospital stay that ended in a termination for maternal health reasons.

I felt traumatised from the experiences of dealing with HG and further exacerbated by the some of the doctors and nurses treatment of me in hospital.

My first day of admission I vomited at least 100 times during that day, the nurse paged the doctor multiple times as the medications I was given were not helping and the vomiting was getting worse, I was vomiting blood from tears in my oesophagus. The doctors repeatedly said they weren't coming and they had charted me everything they could. That included oral medications that I was unable to swallow because they wouldn't stay down. The only relief from symptoms I got that day was when my partner called a REACH call and the ICU doctors charted me more effective medications because my doctors continued to refuse to see me or chart anything more.

Multiple doctors and nurses said to me 'your bloods and obs are fine so we aren't concerned' and 'this is just a pregnancy symptom' - whilst I vomited 5-6 times every 30-60 minutes, my throat felt like razor blades, I was vomiting blood and I was in a very dark place psychologically. Whilst clinically the staff may not have been concerned, it is incredibly distressing to be dismissed and told your suffering is not a concern to them. I attended the hospital to get symptom relief from vomiting 40+ times a day and I received very dismissive comments throughout my stay that made it clear to me that the staff did not take my concerns seriously or care about my wellbeing.

I was told by a doctor that 'we are treating women with vaginal bleeding, we are very busy', essentially telling me that I was not a priority and that other patients were in a worse situation to me. I am well aware that 50% of women who experience HG will end up with PTSD and many will experience anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. I am also aware that HG sufferers are likely to have long term gastrointestinal damage and dental complications, malnutrition, dehydration, chronic ketosis, neurological complications, preeclampsia and eclampsia; that babies of HG sufferers are at risk of pre-term labour, low birth weight among plenty of other serious complications. At no stage in my admission did I feel like the doctors were treating this as a serious pregnancy complication rather there was plenty of talk about it being 'morning sickness' and just a 'symptom of pregnancy'.

I was consistently told by doctors that it would likely 'improve by around 12 weeks'. This is a thoughtless comment to make, I am not sure if it was made out of a desire to give hope or if the doctors actually weren't very aware of HG, but it did not give me very much confidence in their ability to treat my condition. I am well aware that HG generally lasts until around 20 weeks gestation for most and for around 20% HG lasts the duration of the pregnancy.

I had a male nurse looking after me on one shift. At around midnight this nurse came into the room to change my fluid bag and thought it was the right time to tell me 'morning sickness usually ends by the second trimester and you know you'll forget all about this once the baby is born' and he proceeded to tell me about his experience after his wife had his children. This was said to me after I had decided to proceed with a termination of pregnancy, a fact that was in my notes and he would have known. This comment from him was incredibly insensitive at a time when I was suffering and also dealing with the grief of a decision to end a very wanted pregnancy, I did not need a male nurse telling me I would forget all about the suffering I was experiencing, this is simply not true and I have never heard a HG survivor having 'forgotten' the hell they went through.

When I raised my decision to have a termination with the doctor I was told 'you need two consultants to consent to a termination', this comment made me feel like my autonomy had been taken away from me. I understand that the only consent required for a termination is the patient's consent. This comment was very hard to hear when I was bed bound in hospital and unable to just leave and seek my own termination. To add to this, I asked around five or six doctors in total for a termination and felt as though my decision was being dismissed at many points and was consistently told to 'think about it', as if this was a decision I would make lightly.

I told one doctor my mouth was full of saliva and I was unable to swallow it due to the damage done to my oesophagus after vomiting around 100 times on Thursday. This doctor said to me 'what do you want me to do about that'. I was honestly shocked that a doctor would speak to a patient that way. I am well aware that there is medication that can be used to treat hypersalivation and this comment was incredibly dismissive. I spent the entire admission spitting my saliva into tissues and going through around two boxes a day because my throat was too sore to swallow and it was also making the nausea worse.

These concerns may seem trivial to someone who has not experienced HG, however I am well aware that many HG sufferers experience a similar kind of treatment by medical staff and it stays with you for a long time. I cannot and likely will never forget the things that were said to me by staff and the way it made me feel, I relive the comments these doctors made constantly, I break down in tears many times a day remembering what happened. I felt unsafe to continue my pregnancy because I felt constantly dismissed and that my suffering was not taken seriously.