

Submission
No 344

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 15 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I gave birth in a public hospital in early 2020. I have lasting psychological birth trauma from the dismissive and condescending way I was treated when at my most vulnerable.

I was induced when ten days overdue - I had no problem with this and felt that my options were discussed with me clearly. My issues stem solely from terrible communication from one midwife.

After having Cervidil inserted at about 7am, I presented at hospital around 5pm with tightening, where my membranes ruptured. None of the staff were able to find the Cervidil inside me to remove it, and even asked me to remove it myself, which was confusing and uncomfortable, as well as unsuccessful. I was eventually given gas just for a midwife to very roughly remove the Cervidil. My husband has a very strong impression that they were concerned and that something had gone 'wrong' here, but nobody communicated to either of us about this situation.

I was quickly hooked up to oxytocin which was turned up high and I was completely patronised by the midwives who said it was 'go go juice'. I would have felt much more respected and in control had I been talked to as an adult with basic medical terms. My husband also did not understand what the drip was until after the birth.

After about 5 hours, the main midwife spoke to my husband, over me, and said 'she must be more dilated surely, considering the noises she's making!' and laughed. This memory still upsets me years later - I felt like they were mocking me while in labour and there was absolutely no reason to make this observation, much less to someone in the room while in earshot of me.

After learning I wasn't progressing well, this same midwife said, again to my husband instead of me, 'she needs an epidural, because she is obviously not coping.' I have no issues with the epidural decision but felt that I was again completely infantilised and patronised while she made decisions for me. When inserting the catheter, the midwife said to her student midwife, 'just stick it straight in, don't be shy, she can't feel it', while I was very much alert and able to feel some sensation. She did not ask me what I could feel or whether I was comfortable with this procedure (NB I had previously given permission for the student midwife to attend though).

After progressing, I pushed for about two hours, in which time I said repeatedly, 'I think the baby is stuck.' This same midwife said 'don't be silly, of course he's not stuck!' and kept pressuring me to change positions, try other things etc. These two hours were incredibly distressing. Eventually my husband had a word with her and the obstetrician was called in, who performed an ultrasound and almost immediately said 'the baby is stuck.' This obstetrician came to the head of the bed to talk me through the plan for a forceps delivery attempt and then if unsuccessful, a c section would be needed. She spoke directly to me, allowed me to ask questions and clarify points, and asked if there was anything she could explain better. This was the first time I felt that I was treated as a person during the whole ordeal, apart from the anaesthetist administering the epidural who also spoke directly to me, gave me information, and stayed with me for a long time talking me through the process.

My baby was born with forceps and an episiotomy which was physically traumatising, but I am incredibly thankful to have had access to an amazing women's health physio. Her services

were incredibly significant to me my physical and mental recovery and I would strongly recommend that women's health physios are included in post natal care as standard.

My baby had a misshapen head (cephalohaematoma) due to the extended pushing phase when I was ignored by the midwife. When I pointed out his swollen head to the nurses, I was repeatedly told that would go down in 48 hours. When it didn't go down, the nurses said it might take one week, then 6 weeks, and eventually when he was one year old I got an ultrasound on his head through my GP. While he is physically fine, he appears to have a permanently misshapen head from being stuck - due to the inaction of the midwife who ignored my distress that something wasn't right. I found it very triggering for friends and family to ask about the lump on his head, which is now thankfully covered in hair.

I am now pregnant with my second baby and have found Caseload Midwifery a fantastic service for someone in my position, as I am quite anxious to avoid a similar experience the second time. Caseload Midwifery is difficult to get on to and I am so glad I was able to access this - it takes the pressure off the overcrowded hospital antenatal clinic, provides personal 1:1 care, and provides women with an opportunity to get to know the midwife who will (likely) attend their birth.