

Submission
No 346

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My first birth was in 2021 when I was 26 at _____ Hospital NSW. I was a part of the Midwife Group Practice throughout my pregnancy.

In summary of my birth experience, I had a fairly straightforward pregnancy and on the 15th April 2021 at 5am my waters broke spontaneously. I was 38 weeks along and contractions began soon after. I attended the birthing suite later that morning and progressed naturally. After lunch, I was experiencing intense pain at 7cm dilated and fully effaced so I requested an epidural. The anaesthesia staff did not introduce themselves or acknowledge me. Epidural was administered an hour later and incorrectly at the wrong dosage (only half strength) by a trainee. I continued to experience pain until it was eventually fixed by a different anaesthetist. At 7pm, the midwife shift changeover happened and my new midwife came in with a completely different approach. She was very 'cowboy' in her approach with the first thing she said being "let's get this show on the road", and immediately started setting up a drip for me. She originally said the drip was because I'd been labouring for a while now and antibiotics would be administered by the drip. Soon after I came to realise it was also Pitocin drip to induce stronger contractions. This was not discussed with me at all. I truly feel this was the turning point for why my birth experience was so traumatic. I was very happy with labouring the way I was since the epidural was fixed, however, she started the dosage at 15. Contractions got very intense but it wasn't long before she doubled the dosage to 30 and then doubled again so much so that my contractions were coming in doubles with no break in between. This went on for a long time and I was distressed and exhausted. My husband and I felt completely helpless. The midwife told me she could see baby's head and I was told to push at each contraction. I pushed for close to three hours with no progression - to say I was exhausted and mentally clocked out is an understatement. I found myself wanting to change positions or try different things like using a grip over my head to help push but nothing was ever offered. My husband stepped in at that point and said we need to try something else. The midwife turned the drip down to 15 while she called the theatre team. Thankfully, at no point was baby in distress.

Just before midnight I was greeted by a room full of people who had me sign consent forms and then I was wheeled to the operating theatre. The operating team performed an episiotomy before trying the vacuum unsuccessfully. They then used forceps successfully to deliver baby (born at 12:57am 16 April 2021). My baby needed immediate resuscitation but was fine shortly after. I was then stitched up and wheeled to recovery for the next four hours before heading back to the women's ward.

My post birth care was pretty atrocious as well. So many things unfolded that left me speechless. During the 6 days of my stay (due to baby jaundice and my diagnosis of postpartum pre eclampsia), the most compassionate person I dealt with the entire time was surprisingly the meal cart lady.

Overall, there were so many times I was left traumatised by events that unfolded;

I wasn't acknowledged at all and felt like a guinea pig to the first anaesthesia staff and trainee that administered my epidural incorrectly.

I felt like a number rather than a person to the midwife on shift during my labour. She rushed everything and seemed to want me to birth my baby as soon as possible despite there being

no rational reason to rush. She did not inform me of her intention to induce stronger contractions with the Pitocin drip and I felt completely helpless.

I wasn't given information or options by midwives for different things to try during my time labouring through contractions (no birthing balls, changing positions, etc.) and I felt completely helpless during the three hours of pushing.

I felt completely unsupported by midwives and medical professionals post birth also, including breastfeeding and I wasn't given instruction on how to care for my incision and (I believe as a result of this) I couldn't sit or walk for 6 weeks as my episiotomy site became infected and I required antibiotics.

There were also multiple times I found midwives to be incorrect - one attempting to inject my stomach with a needle and when I asked what it was for, she responded that it was because I'd had a caesarian. Obviously untrue and left me feeling like I wasn't in the best of care at all. Numerous midwives also kept getting my medical details and baby's details wrong too.

I'm lucky to have a supportive husband to talk through the trauma we both suffered. We just felt failed time and time again by the care of medical staff. I suffered (and still do two years on) from postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety, and PTSD, I believe as a direct result of such birth trauma.

I did not realise I'd need to advocate for myself so much and truly trusted medical professionals before this life-changing event occurred.

I am now pregnant again and am absolutely terrified of what's to come.