

Submission
No 349

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 15 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I birthed at [redacted]. The first appointment i had with a midwife we were given very vague information and the midwife tried to complete the process but clearly had little idea which paper forms needed to be filled out or what information to relay to us. It was as though she was looking around for some kind of checklist as to the things she was meant to do and say. As a first time pregnancy this felt disappointing and didn't inspire a lot of confidence. We later found out she was a casual.

I went into labour spontaneously at 37 weeks and due to my waters breaking early i was asked to go to hospital for monitoring to check my baby's heart rate before i could return home in early labour. I was hooked up to a machine and told to lie on my back (something i hadn't done in months). The 'Midwife in charge' came in.. didn't introduce herself and said something abrupt about checking out what my "trouble maker" of a baby was doing. I found this rude, unhelpful and i can only imagine how different i would have felt if she'd said something warm, comforting, or at least asked me how i was feeling. Unsurprisingly i felt anxious and hence what was supposed to be a 20 minute check took 3 hours before my heart rate calmed down enough to continue to labour at home (i wasn't progressed long enough to stay in hospital). If it wasn't for the calm birth/labour techniques that my partner had learned to support me with in a course we took outside of the public system i don't imagine how both myself and baby would have been able to feel calm enough to have our heartrates drop enough to return home safely. The hospital provided no support to me as to how to relax and stay calm. my partner was 100% the expert in this situation, the midwives and additional swabs i was asked to take (COVID AND GBS) only made the process feel harder.

i laboured for 30 hours to find i was 10 centimetres dilated and was told to push despite ever having the urge to push. I was pushing as hard as a could on advice from the midwife because i'd reached the policy threshold of 24 hours since waters breaking and if i wanted to continue i had to move rooms (after 30 hours labour not so easy) and be continuously monitored despite bubs heart rate being completely stable the whole time. I felt rushed, i was trying to push my baby out on a timeline because of a policy.. it was only then that my bub's heart rate dropped (forcing to push when they clearly weren't ready) that i was completely DONE and asked for some support to get bub out. I had a forceps delivery in theatre under spinal block. The doctors were amazing and very supportive, i feel grateful that my baby arrived safely.

However, what is most confusing and hurtful to me is that i felt i was being rushed to push my baby out (who clearly wasn't ready to come out hence having no urge to push yet) and then when i couldn't push any longer and asked for help (pain relief and intervention - YES i wanted this 2 hours pushing i could barely stand up) i felt like i was having to fight for it?! The messaging i was receiving was "hurry up and push your baby out" which didn't happen for two hours, then when i wanted help i felt like i really had to beg for it and was told it would be a long time before i could get into theatre, for the drugs to kick in etc etc. I'm not sure how me and my baby were meant to remain calm in such a pressured environment.

When i was in the postnatal ward i asked for a pelvic floor physio referral due to having a forceps delivery and i was previously educated as to the pelvic floor trauma that can occur

(not provided by the system - i did my own research and sourced a private prenatal physio). A few days after my birth i was home and the physio from the ward called and said "i'm not sure why you've been referred to us". This shocked me, had she'd looked at my notes she would have seen i had a forceps delivery. The obstetrician who delivered my baby came for a debrief the next morning after birth and suggested that i should be 'pretty aggressive' about pevic floor rehab - i found this helpful and was grateful for the advice.. only to be followed up by a physio to say they're "not sure" why someone who'd had a forceps delivery might be referred. This was complete mixed messaging, which made me feel as though i needed to ASK and justify my need for information as to how to care for my own body - clearly no multidisciplinary team work happening on the post natal ward.

I would love to see continuity of care models prioritised in the public system. Midwifery Group Practice should be the predominant model available to women and families. All women should be able to be visited in their homes after birth by midwives to assist with feeding/support. I was about 100m out of the catchment so my partner and i had to travel into hospital each day for baby's checks. i understand the system has to draw a line somewhere but i feel this in home support is so critical.