

Submission
No 325

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 15 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I gave birth at hospital last year.

I ended up being in labour for around 28 hours and during those hours experienced traumatic events which has resulted in me seeking psychological help and EDMR therapy to overcome this trauma. Whilst I believe my experience is far less traumatic than a lot of other stories I have heard, I believe my experience still matters and can be potentially used to help others in the future.

To summarise my labour and birth, I believe my lack of options and communication between hospital staff was lacking. I went into labour around 10pm on the 26th of October. I waited until I knew that labour was well under way before heading into the hospital, and when I knew I couldn't handle it at home anymore. When I arrived at the hospital I was offered Panadeine forte or go back home. This was around 3am. After a while it was again suggested that I could either have some morphine or if I would like to go home. By this stage my labour had progressed and I knew that there was no way that I would be able to continue to labour at home, and I asked for the morphine.

From memory, around 7am I was given the morphine and then had someone come and check how dilated I was. They checked me and then told me that the next thing would be to break my waters to try and get the labour going further. This then happened without any warning, and without me giving consent for this procedure to happen. I feel this had caused a lot of my trauma as I did not understand what was going on and what to expect when this was done.

After a couple of hours of labouring I decided that I would like to get an epidural, so I was moved to another room. When the anaesthetist came in, she was quite hostile stating that she had been very busy in theatre all morning, hence the delay in getting to me.

During the day we had a wonderful midwife who was very clear and able to communicate effectively and was very understanding of my needs. I continued to labour using gas and the epidural throughout the day.

Around 11pm the next midwife was due to change the cassette for the epidural, but she forgot to release the line which she had which kinked, which meant the epidural started wearing off and I was feeling contractions again and I was in unbelievable pain and discomfort unable to understand what was going on.

I had another doctor come and check me again to see what was happening and they said that the baby was just not coming down as they would like so they wanted to take me to theatre for an emergency caesarean. One of my support people and the midwife asked whether or not a trial of forceps would be suitable, which they then spoke to me about and said they would try that. This was not presented as an option to me to start.

When I was ready to go around to theatre, there was a long delay. We were told that there had been an emergency Covid case and that during the evening there was only one theatre open due to staffing so we had to wait for the Covid clean to be done.

My daughter was born around 330am with a successful trial of forceps in theatre.

The next morning I had a visit from a pair of doctors that I had not seen before, they were doing a morning round of patients. They told me that I had to be taken urgently to theatre due to the fact that the baby's heart rate had been dropping quite low, when I questioned this they didn't know what had been going on and said that they would check the notes. When the next doctor came around I asked her about this and she said she was unsure why I was told that as it was not the case - the reason for me going to theatre was that I hadn't progressed enough to deliver naturally. This was very confusing for us and we were told to put in a complaint to the hospital regarding this. They apologised for the misunderstanding and confirmed that the baby's heart rate was normal during the labour.

I've had numerous attempts at contacting the hospital for a birth debrief and every time I've been told I would get a call back, to no avail.

Recommendations I have are:

1. Legislation on informed consent for women undergoing procedures with a clear explanation as to what is to be expected.
2. Clearer handovers between staffing and specialists that are involved in patient care
3. More funding for postpartum care eg, women's health physio, lactation support, social worker/psych care