

Submission  
No 321

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I had a traumatic birth five years ago.

I had birthed my daughter, without pain relief or intervention, at [redacted], with the midwifery group practice. I felt afraid and unprepared but I felt positive about the experience overall.

My expectation was that my son's birth three years later would be similarly straightforward. However, from the booking-in interview onwards it was clear that the staff at Hospital had a less woman-centred view of birth.

A midwife telephoned after my first scan to inform me that I needed twice the number of "routine" scans. When I asked why, the midwife didn't know, just informed me that it said "AMA" on my file and the obstetrician had told her to tell me I needed more scans.

"What did the dating scan show?" I asked. "Was there a concern about me or my baby?"

I was starting to feel anxious.

I asked what "AMA" meant. She didn't know and asked a colleague. "Advanced maternal age." I was 39, and I was healthy and fit, with a recent history of normal birth.

At every appointment, I felt a sense of pressure. Midwives said things like "we won't let you go past 39 weeks because it will put the baby at risk" and every time I asked if there was a specific reason or concern about me and my baby, they would just look away or say something vague. If I pushed they would say that if I didn't follow the directives I wouldn't be able to stay with the midwifery group practice.

At one appointment an obstetrician told me about risks to my unborn child that weren't relevant to my situation; she said I would "need" to be induced but didn't give me any reason for this.

One midwife quit midway through my pregnancy and apologised to me at our last appointment that she wouldn't be there to "protect" me at the birth.

At several appointments I tried to talk about my birth preferences, and each time the midwife shut me down, saying it wasn't the right time. I grew increasingly frustrated that I wasn't being allowed to express my wishes for labour and birth, or have them documented. One midwife wrote in my notes that I was "weepy and tearful" but did not explain why.

I continually felt as though I was in a battle with the maternity staff. It was stressful.

I went into spontaneous labour at 40 weeks. When I arrived at the hospital I went to the birth suite. I'd been told the new birth suites were state-of-the-art with soft lighting and fragrance oils. Actually there was bright strip lighting and the usual hospital smell.

I got into the birthing pool but the water was cold. I laboured there until the cold started to make me shake. The midwife kept checking her watch. I was handling the contractions, breathing, using a TENs machine.

The midwife kept asking if she could do a vaginal examination to check how dilated I was. I kept saying "maybe later" but it was effortful to have to be pulled out of my focus on labour and say "no." I was cold, and the lights were very bright and I didn't feel comfortable.

The midwife kept interrupting me to say "things need to start progressing or 'they' will want to get things moving", and I had the sense she herself was fearful of the hospital system or perhaps her boss.

Eventually her shift ended and another midwife came into the room with a partner. They didn't introduce themselves. The first midwife was very brusque and told me over and over that I would need to "speed things up."

They wanted to break my waters. They said this "needed" to happen. They were intermittently checking the baby's heartbeat and he was fine, not registering any distress. Over and over and over this midwife told me I wasn't progressing fast enough, and because I was labouring hard and the contractions were taking my whole attention, and because it was clear that they wouldn't stop badgering and harassing me until I said yes, and I wanted to be left alone to birth rather than having to argue, eventually I gave in.

I later found out that it had only been six hours since I arrived, up to the point where they broke my waters.

She broke my waters and almost immediately the contractions went from intense to unbearable. I didn't feel as though I could manage them with my breathing techniques, and I felt very panicked and out of control. The midwife - and I realise this sounds paranoid, but I felt this very strongly - seemed pleased that she was now in charge and that I was not in control.

At one point I asked her if I should start pushing, and she smirked at me and just shrugged. The message was clearly "you're on your own."

I birthed my son in a rush. I believe that he was born so fast he hadn't had time to clear the fluid from his lungs, and when he came out he wasn't breathing properly. It took a few moments before the midwife seemed to notice and alerted the neonatal team. The NICU team rushed in. No one told me what was happening, but they took my son away, while I began to have a haemorrhage.

The midwife stabbed the syntocin syringe into my leg and said viciously and angrily "THIS is why we have managed fourth-stage labour."

I felt as though I was being punished for something, my desire to have an undisturbed birth or my obstinacy about not agreeing to interventions.

She did not ask for my consent before she administered the sintocin.

She was digging into my belly so aggressively the pain ewas agonising and I was screaming (I hadn't screamed in labour, as a comparison) and shouting "stop stop, please stop," and she did not.

During this time I did not know if my son was alive or dead.

I lay in the bed with tears streaming down my face, and the midwife said "I'm glad of a quiet minute to catch up on my paperwork."

Then she left the room and I was alone, feeling broken and defeated and numb, looking at the empty cot wondering whether or not my baby was dead.

Eventually I needed to pee, so I dragged myself out of bed and immediately a large amount of blood gushed onto the floor. When the midwife came back into the room she scolded me for bleeding everywhere.

An obstetrician came in to give me stitches for a first degree tear. She said she needed to insert a finger into my anus to check for tears. I said I did not want this.

I said "NO."

She said she "had" to do it. I argued that she didn't need to and I didn't want her to. She repeated that she "had to" and I felt again that it didn't matter what I said, that she was going to keep pushing and pressuring me. I did not consent and she did this anyway.

Eventually I said sarcastically "if that makes you happy" and she carried out this (unnecessary) procedure. I did not have tearing, as I had known. I felt this was a violation, I would almost consider this an assault.

My husband came into the room to tell me our son was stable and I could go to him. I could hardly walk, and I struggled to get to the lift. The midwife stood and watched me struggle. As soon as I arrived on the floor the maternity ward was in, and where the NICU was, a nurse took one look at me and rushed over with a wheelchair.

In the end my son was in NICU for four days. He was given antibiotics, glucose and formula without mine or his father's knowledge or consent. No one asked me for my permission or even notified me of these treatments.

I had had a postpartum haemorrhage of over 1000ml. I received absolutely no care or follow-up checks while I was in the maternity ward.

My GP prescribed an iron infusion at my six-week postnatal check because my iron levels were so low, and said that she didn't understand why I hadn't been offered an infusion while in hospital.

If I had been allowed to birth at my body's own pace, I do not believe I would have had a haemorrhage, and I do not think my baby would have needed emergency care.

I felt coerced, disrespected and demeaned by the people who were supposed to be 'caring' for my baby and I.

The way the midwives and obstetricians pushed for intervention and were only focused on speeding up the process created a dangerous and traumatic situation. I became fearful instead of feeling empowered. I know empowered birth is possible because I have experienced it.

The trauma I experienced affected me very deeply and I am still dealing with the psychological, physical and emotional scars five years later. I believe it also affected my child.

The worst part is that there is a wealth of evidence to support allowing women to birth undisturbed, and the maternity system does not seem to follow any of these recommendations.

We need gentle birth houses. The huge number of women reporting traumatic birth, along with the devastating impact of women forced to birth alone during COVID should be a clear indication that our current system isn't working.

Women should not be birthing in an environment meant for treating sickness and injury. Birth is not an emergency but a natural physiological process. Most women can birth normally without needing hospital care.

We need to restore woman-centred care and allow midwives to work with women in the ways that the data shows to be most effective. Women and babies deserve care and respect, not to be bullied and coerced and traumatised at the most vulnerable time in our lives.

We know better. Let's do better.