

Submission
No 406

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Hi, I am a 30yo female who gave birth to my first in 2020 in a major tertiary hospital in NSW. My wife is a nurse and we naively went in to birth trusting the system. I had fragmented midwifery care and gave birth at a tertiary hospital. Throughout my antenatal, labour, birth and post partum care, not once did I have the same midwife look after me. I came away with birth trauma. I was forced to birth on my back. I tried to get up but the midwife told me to get back in the bed. Baby's apgar score was healthy but cord was cut early and baby whisked away to be scrubbed down by midwives. Not once did anyone ask my preference of what I wanted. It was just done to us. Everything that happened was not my preference.

During all of this my wife was not "allowed" to answer any basic questions on my behalf even when I was literally pushing my baby out. I was made to answer questions myself. If you've ever seen a woman giving birth you'd know that this completely disrupts the entire birthing process. My wife was disregarded and ignored, even in the antenatal appointments. I can't be sure if this has anything to do with being a same sex couple or if everyone is treated the same. She was made to feel insignificant and powerless throughout the entire journey. She also carries some trauma from this birth.

I was told I'd be getting induced at an appointment a few days before my due date. I'm still not even sure why. My pregnancy was very low risk and growing well. I was well. It wasn't discussed with me. This put undue pressure and stress on me in my final days of pregnancy. This should be an enjoyable time of life, not a pressured anxious one.

During birth I was threatened with an episiotomy. Something I didn't want, or need. No one even asked what I wanted or didn't want. Not myself or my wife.

Then breastfeeding. My baby was forcefully shoved on to my breast because he wasn't feeding quick enough to keep the midwives and system happy. I spent one night in hospital by choice so I could learn how to feed with support before going home. What a mistake that was. The midwife assigned to me overnight was unfriendly and without consent shoved the back of my baby's head and pushed him on to my breast in an attempt to get him to latch. We both became very distressed and obviously had no success. In what world is that ever ok to do. Even someone who knows nothing about breastfeeding would notice that this practice is not ok. I felt afraid to ask for help from a different midwife overnight and feared I'd be treated poorly by my assigned midwife if I did. So I simply struggled through the night by myself, counting the hours until my wife could return.

I really needed my wife and support person there that night. But she wasn't allowed to stay. Instead I was "cared" for by busy, understaffed, jaded, unfriendly and uncaring midwives.

When we went home and had a different midwife visit us at home for 5 days, we also experienced terrible care and support. Again, these were all midwives we'd never met before. One midwife came one day and told us to try cup feeding our son. So we did. The very next

day her colleague arrived, took a look at how we were feeding and scoffed and said “why on earth would you do that?!” This made us feel so inadequate as a family. It was horrible. We felt we were failing everything, but in hindsight, the system failed us immensely.

This all started what was to be the end of my much wanted breast feeding journey. Something I will grieve for for the rest of my life.

I feel like all of this could have been avoided had we have been able to access a continuity of care midwifery group practice type model of care. They were all booked out so fragmented hospital care was our only option unless we spent thousands on a private midwife.

We have since spent hundreds of dollars on counselling and support to help our family get past all the things that were so simply taken away from us when becoming parents. And we will carry the trauma forever.

It is easy to see how this situation could have been avoided. Since this experience my have had a mother baby. My wife birthed our second and my gosh what a completely different and happy story to tell. We were lucky enough to be able to access a midwifery group practice that offers homebirth. Something we wanted. And we were lucky enough to know that we needed to book in with them as soon as we found out we were pregnant.

They provided antenatal appointments in our home so the whole family was involved and respected our decisions and opinions and discussed all options with us so we could make informed decisions about our care. We discussed our wants and needs, our midwife discussed our situation with all of the midwives on their team (there are only eight of them on this team in a major city. That alone is something that just isn't right either). This meant that no matter which midwife was on duty when needed, they all knew and respected our desires without us having to explain anything. As it turned out, our assigned midwife was off duty the day we birthed, however, the two magnificent midwives who supported us were brilliant and helped us achieve an amazing and supported home birth, just as we wanted and just as it should be. No one intervened when unnecessary. No one pressured us. No one coerced us. No one threatened us with unnecessary procedures.

The entire family was involved and there has been zero birth trauma or feelings of invalidation from this experience. It was a very long 36hour labour, however we were very well supported and had the midwives come over whenever we needed reassurance.

On top of that, our breast feeding journey has been smoother than our fresh baby's bottom. The continuity of care and post partum support from known midwives has ensured this. It makes such a difference to see known midwives and to be able to call them to ask questions in those first and critical post partum days. The midwives were even supportive of our journey of co-breast feeding. The entire family was looked after.

We spent two years researching and spending money on courses and products to better arm ourselves going in to this pregnancy and birth. It shouldn't take two years of personal research, money and trauma to ensure a positive experience. Women and families should be able to trust the system and trust the professionals. My wife is a nurse and the whole experience of my birth compared to hers has left her feeling so disheartened with the "system" she once trusted.

The midwifery group practice nurses are just as busy and short staffed as any midwife, but the care they deliver just can't compare. This experience and birth has had a lasting positive impact on our immediate and extended family. It is something that should be available to everyone.

I haven't even gone in to depth about my experience with an avoidable pelvic organ prolapse that occurred because of terrible post natal advice from a doctor I should have been able to trust. We have spent hundreds of dollars on physiotherapy since then to help myself and to hopefully prevent my wife experiencing the same injury and trauma. A trauma and injury that has impacted my life in more ways than I can bear to think about at the moment. From career, to sports, to hobbies and family. My life will never be the same, and this injury was avoidable. Why is there not more funding and support for these problems. Again, we had some amazing information, guidance and support from the midwives in the midwifery group practice that has helped immensely. We got this care and information because the midwives knew us and knew our story and concerns. We would not have (and did not) received such care in the fragmented hospital model of care.

The system needs to be better and do better. Please, do better for birthing people everywhere and fund more continuity of care, and homebirth, programs. Find more midwives in the hospital system so the midwives aren't too busy to care.

When there is continuity of care, midwives can focus on caring for women.

When there is fragmented care, women have to tell their needs, wants, fears etc to every different practitioner they see. Practitioners who are too busy to listen to every woman's story every appointment. So womens' needs, wants, fears etc go largely unheard and the (broken, understaffed, overworked) system takes over, thus fueling birth trauma.