

Submission
No 407

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I would like to share my personal experience of giving birth with the committee to provide insight into the experience and prevalence of birth trauma and the causes and factors that contributed to my experience.

Throughout my two births I experienced inappropriate care from various members of the team in charge of my care during birth and postnatally. My desires and feelings were dismissed at multiple points. Requests for certain care like pain medication were ignored or denied. Procedures were undertaken without my consent. I was told my baby would die in attempts to coerce me into undertaking procedures.

Below I have included my birth stories to highlight to the committee all the points where my care was inadequate and inappropriate. Giving birth was the most dehumanising experience of my life.

First birth: 2018

Induced at 39+4 after presentation to maternity with < fetal movements for 3/7.

Induction via cervidil tape, inserted 7/2/2018 at 6pm.

Midwives provided limited information on the effects of the cervidil. I spent the night in agony, with severe sciatic type pain and vomiting. Unable to walk after I attempted to move to the bathroom and couldn't reach a buzzer for assistance. Sat on the floor of my room for 90 minutes until pain subsided enough to stand up. No one came to check or heard me calling for assistance. When I requested pain relief the midwife stated "Geez. If you're asking for pain relief now, you're not going to make it through labour! You're gunna need a bit more grit, love".

Waters were broken and syntocin started the next morning at 8am. I laboured without pain relief until 3pm, however my contractions were debilitating and I would lose strength in my legs every time I had a contraction. My midwife throughout this was wonderful. We was encouraging and supportive, she called the anaesthetist when I asked for the epidural, however kept encouraging me through different positions, empowering words and gentle approach. Her shift ended and another midwife came on, however when she was on her break a different midwife performed a VE and said "You're only 3cm. All that screaming for 3cm? We could hear you down the hallway. Maybe you just need to accept you can't do it and ask for a Caesarean."

The other midwife returned from her break, and the epidural was inserted. The OB on duty examined me and advised that my baby was posterior and face first, however her head was positioned into the left side of my pelvis and her face was being pushed out at each

contraction - she was literally head down onto my sciatic and every contraction was basically paralysing. When the epidural had taken effect, I was dilated from 3cm - 10cm in less than 20 minutes and baby girl was born with the cord wrapped around her neck twice and it had been clamped by her head when she was descending the birth canal. I vividly remember the OB looking at the midwife and saying "that baby was one wrong turn away from coming out blue". Her Apgar was 7 at birth and she required brief intervention on my chest to get her breathing. I still remember the sinking feeling watching my baby get paler and bluer on my chest instead of getting pink and crying.

During these few minutes, I was not aware that they had proceeded to administer the injection to deliver the placenta and had delivered my placenta using traction. I advised that I wished they had asked me first and she said "it's just the placenta, it doesn't even matter. I wanted to hurry it up so I can stitch this up and move on to my next job. My to-do list today is very long."

I had a grade 2b tear, and required internal and external stitches, which were being stitched before I was even aware there was a doctor at the end of the bed. Then she advised I had 9 individual stitches across my labia for "small grazes".

It took me a long time to recover from the fear I felt from not being advised of how different types of pain could present, how the cervix worked, and also the language used surrounding my "lack of grit" and "only being 3cm" etc. I was resentful that I was made to feel like I was a burden, too loud, and incompetent as a birthing woman.

I asked to be discharged home straight away, as I wanted to be able to settle with my baby in my own home, she was healthy, she had latched and I was feeling confident with family support at home. The midwife said that because I had tested positive for GBS, I "am not allowed" to take my baby home within 24 hours as "she will die if she has contracted your infection." They advised that she MUST have her temperature checked every 3 hours to ensure no fevers developed.

I felt I had no choice and returned to the ward, where the midwives advised that I had missed the dinner rounds and they were unable to find a spare meal. The midwife checking me in said "if you didn't carry on about going home, maybe we'd have had your forms filled out and a meal would be here."

I felt like a child being scolded for every little thing. We settled into our room, my husband went out to get some dinner and when he came back he asked at the front whether we could please have some Panadol as my stitches were uncomfortable and I had a headache from the epidural. This was around 8-9pm.

We didn't have anyone come into our room until 5:30 am the next morning, when a midwife came in and I said "I thought she was supposed to have 3 hourly obs?" and the midwife looked at me and said "she did".

"No, no one has been here and her chart is empty." The midwife then stood there and wrote in front of me, 3 hourly times and temperatures and said "you must have been asleep when I came in".

I hadn't slept a wink, because I was terrified that my baby would develop a fever and die while I was sleeping.

I then insisted to be discharged, as we weren't receiving any post natal care anyway. The midwives and doctors kept repeating "You need to understand you are signing out a newborn child against medical advise and if she develops a fever, gets sick or dies, it is your decision to have left the ward against our advise".

Second birth: 2020

My son's pregnancy was progressing normally, however my maternity ward began advising that due to my "increased risk as a result of higher weight", I needed more frequent late term ultrasounds. During these ultrasounds, they began to note that my baby was measuring above the 95th centile. At 30 weeks they began discussing the risk of delivering a "very large baby" and stating that "we will not allow your pregnancy to continue past 39 weeks". "If your baby gets stuck, he will die". "You are not going to be able to push out a baby that big".

I kept resisting booking in an induction, as I was aware that ultrasounds could be inaccurate, I didn't feel as though he was particularly large, and I felt well and healthy. I was working with a doula who provided assistance to advocate for natural labour and birth.

Unfortunately at 38 weeks I had an episode where my blood pressure was slightly higher and I'd had a headache. They then started saying that I "need to consider an induction for the sake of my baby."

I felt pushed and coerced the whole time. I heard "Your baby will die if they get stuck" multiple times, and at almost every appointment.

I eventually agreed to be induced at 39 weeks, however requested the foley catheter rather than the cervidil, and requested delayed syntocin after my waters were ruptured. The OB repeatedly pushed to "just start the drip and hurry things along, we don't have all day". My midwife was listening and listening to my requests, regularly checking my contractions

manually as the monitors weren't working and she would physically feel for contractions and time them before discussing increasing the drip. I felt as though I was being heard and supported and in control.

I had been labouring well and felt lots of progression and increasing in the intensity, and then a midwife I hadn't met grabbed my arm mid contraction and took my blood pressure. Then I noticed that she was touching the drip. I was mid contraction and the doula leant in to advise me that the new midwife had increased the syntocin significantly.

Shortly after this I began experiencing contractions one on top of the other with no break in between, and began to panic. I became distressed and then I could feel my baby move down and had a strong urge to push. When I reached down and felt for myself, I could feel the pressure of his head and felt like he was coming very soon. The OB came and yelled at me not to push until she checked me and then I remember having hands on me forcing me to roll from hands and knees to on my back. As I did this, I felt a searing pain through my pelvis and a notable sensation of no longer feeling the pressure in my pelvis. They did a VE and told me my dilation had decreased, having gone from 8cm to 6cm. Then there was a deceleration of his heart rate, the OB was called back in, and I was screaming because I had an awful burning/searing pain in my pelvis. They were asking questions and the OB told me that I was going to have a c-section, and now it was an emergency "because you didn't just have it done when I told you to". The assistants were asking if they were moving me and the OB yelled over my bed to them "Shut up, I'm trying to decide which baby is going to die first".

At this point I felt nauseous and then began to panic, my doula was talking me through and trying to get some information for me to understand. Suddenly we were being moved and heading down the hallway, The staff moving my bed were yelling at me to shut up and stop making cow sounds, "it's a hospital not a farm". I had no idea where my husband was.

When we arrived at the OR, the anaesthetist and the other staff put in the spinal. When I was on the bed and hooked up to monitors, I asked whether baby was ok. They said "yes. His heart rate is fine. He's very content in there". I couldn't understand the rush and was wondering if something else was wrong.

When they began to begin the c-section, I asked my husband to film and take photos. They pushed the phone away and said we were not allowed. My husband got very angry and said they can not deny photos of my son's birth, so they allowed one of the nurses to take photos and explicitly said "be careful and do not capture any video footage!".

After my son was born I asked for him to stay with me and have skin to skin while they were stitching me up, they ignored me and took him away and the OB was talking on the phone on speaker and I could hear them telling her that another mother on the ward was now

haemorrhaging. She looked at me and said "I just need to get you out of here. I have a 33 weeker with placental abruption who is far more urgent".

Again, I was made to feel as though I was a burden, and that my c-section wasn't their choice in the first place.

I was then sent to recovery, the nurses in recovery couldn't tell me anything about my son, where he was or if he was ok. I took a long time to recover and kept fading in and out. I was terrified and heartbroken that I had missed the first 3 hours of my son's life because I was too incompetent to birth him properly.

We were then returned to the room at 2am and after they did his weight and stats, I was left alone. I was still numb and couldn't move, and the midwife put my son's bassinet out of reach. My husband had fallen asleep, so I had to wake him to get him to move the bassinet closer. She left the room and we didn't have anyone return until 12:30pm the next day. I had bled and the sheets were messed up, and I asked if I could have some assistance cleaning up and having a shower. The midwife removed the catheter, and then said "the shower is in there" and walked away. She didn't tell me about standing up to shower after a c-section, provide any assistance or offer to help me mobilise for the first time. I was terrified and the pain was awful. After I managed to shower, I opened the door to her stripping the bed and she said "I can't believe the mess you made on these sheets. I guess I'll have to make it again for you!".

I yelled back at her that I had just had a c-section, I couldn't move and I was hooked up to a catheter all night with no one checking on me. I was furious!

We were then discharged the following day (less than 48 hours post csection).