

Submission
No 421

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My daughter was born mid December 2013 at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]

My daughter's birth didn't have to be a traumatic one. I was very healthy and from all indications, my baby was too.

But I was overdue. Overdue according to the Australian system, because I'd also spent part of my pregnancy in the Netherlands and been told a very different due date. That's because there is no exact science to due dates and according to Dr [REDACTED], a midwife, educator, author and researcher with over 25 years experience, due dates are a 'guess', not 'an expiration date'. The date I fell pregnancy was also very uncertain as I had come straight off the pill and then fallen pregnant and never had a period in between. But [REDACTED] was adamant that because of the due date they had guessed at, I was overdue. Dr [REDACTED] has written two well-researched books on induction and contends that 'the policy of induction at a certain point in pregnancy is largely based on fear, tradition, fashion and some outdated, misogynistic ideas rather than sound evidence'.

It is also well documented that the occurrence of induction has been rising exponentially over the last couple of decades and it is now overused.

But because I was 'overdue', the hospital was set on inducing me and basically inferred that if I didn't have an induction, I would be the cause of my baby being stillborn or not being healthy when she was born. This was very upsetting. However when I checked the written evidence that they gave me at the hospital, it said that there was a very low chance of stillbirth, less than 1% and I challenged what the hospital was telling me. However, they were adamant that I be induced and that I was causing risk to my baby, which, of course, really upset me and made me really stressed. I finally met the Head of Obstetrics at the time and he said that if I had regular ultrasounds, it was okay if I waited before being induced.

But because I was so stressed because of the way I felt bullied by the other doctors at the hospital, I couldn't relax to go into labor naturally. In order to bring on labour, I had sex with my husband, which unfortunately broke my waters but didn't bring on labour. So I was forced to have an induction.

There was also a lot of pressure from people at the hospital, it was two weeks before Christmas and so they had shut down a ward, despite the fact that lots of women give birth just before Christmas. I overheard a nurse complain about a woman 'taking up a bed'.

I was part of a midwife's group and had been assigned to a midwife who I really trusted to be on call for my daughter's birth. But before my daughter was born, my midwife hurt her hand, another one from the group became unavailable and so suddenly there was no midwife available from my group for my daughter's birth. On the day I was briefly introduced to

another midwife who I'd never met. I felt really unsupported. The midwife started the induction and then left. She was barely there during the first five hours, only popping in briefly to up the amount of Oxytocin I was receiving. I was using a tens machine and no medication for the pain and was able to handle it. After a few hours, I felt like I had to go to the toilet but wasn't able to. I told the midwife this when she popped in briefly but she did nothing about it. The pain increased exponentially.

After five hours, the midwife examined me and said that I hadn't dilated at all so I would have to have a caesarean. I was heartbroken as I had really wanted to give birth naturally. I was still having huge contractions and shaking from the horrendous pain from the Oxytocin but they told me that this wouldn't dissipate, even though they had changed their minds about how I would give birth. I remember sobbing in pain on the floor alone and no one stepping in to comfort me. And to have the epidural necessary for the caesarean, I would have to be completely still for the needle in my back. I have a phobia of needles and was shaking uncontrollably from the pain so this added additional stress to the whole situation.

After receiving the epidural, another midwife finally arrived who would be present for the rest of my birth, not just popping in for a couple of minutes here and there as the other midwife had. I told this midwife what I'd told the other midwife, that I felt like I had to go to the toilet but I couldn't. She asked if they'd emptied my bladder using a catheter and I said no. She made sure I got one and then suddenly, I dilated very quickly to almost nine cm in a very short amount of time. I hadn't been able to dilate before the catheter so inserted as my bladder was full it was stopping the baby from moving into position. But because I dilated so quickly, my daughter's heartbeat slowed dangerously. The midwife told me she was going to press a big red button on the wall and a whole lot of doctors and nurses were going to come rushing in and not to worry. I asked if my baby was going to be okay. She said that she didn't know. So, of course, I was very upset and worried. My daughter could've died because of the neglect from hospital staff.

Thankfully, my daughter was okay and her heartbeat became stable. Then when it was time for me to push, the midwife felt that I was doing well pushing and could birth my daughter naturally but the Doctor, felt that I needed an episiotomy. I felt pressured to do this so I did and my daughter was born healthily. But I got the impression that the Doctor just wanted to do this as her shift was ending (it was 11.50pm and her shift ended at midnight).

After the way my birth was handled, I wanted to speak to the Doctor in charge in order to discuss what had gone wrong.

We made an appointment to see the Doctor, waited around for at least an hour, our baby crying the whole time, and when we finally were seen, it wasn't the Doctor in charge at all but another Doctor, who knew nothing at all about my daughter's birth or our situation. He hadn't even looked at the file, he glanced at it briefly when we sat down. Due to his apathy

and lack of knowledge and because of the extreme distress and exhaustion I had been through in the last couple of weeks and mainly because we had a baby to care for, we left, unheard.

But because of the birth, my daughter barely slept – at all – after she was born, unless she was being held or in a sling while one of us was standing. She would only sleep between 5.30am and 8.30am every day for the first 11 weeks. My milk was delayed coming in due to stress but finally came in after a week.

Our daughter barely slept for 18 months, it took 18 months until she would sleep more than four hours a night. This made it really difficult to work or even function. We went to numerous sleep schools, saw sleep nurses, no one could help. But every 'sleep nurse' we met would ask: 'Did she have a traumatic birth?'

The episiotomy didn't heal correctly, I was in great pain and the hospital refused to help me. After a friend's recommendation I finally went to [REDACTED] physiotherapy where I felt listened to. After a lot of treatment, I finally started to heal. But it took a long time and this affected our sex life as to have sex caused me a large amount of pain, for almost six months.

I still have pain today from the episiotomy, which I believe could've been avoided if we had been given the proper care during my daughter's birth and not forced into inducing her.

I know no birth goes to plan and you have to be open to what happens. But to be treated with such disregard and neglect from an understaffed and under pressure hospital staff and to be pressured to have an induction for no good reason, caused our family a great deal of unnecessary trauma and distress and put our daughter's life at risk. All of this could've been avoided. Whether induction is necessary if a baby is 'overdue' should be reviewed, as should the accuracy of due dates. Alternative options should be given. Parents shouldn't be made to be pressured or feel that if they don't undergo an induction, they will be putting their baby's life. They should be given the facts impartially.

There should be more funding for midwives so that each woman has an assigned midwife for the length of her baby's birth so mistakes such as the ones made at my daughter's birth don't happen again. Women should not be made to feel that they are 'taking up a bed'. Women shouldn't be pressured into having episiotomies unless it is absolutely necessary. And there should be more funding so women are given the post birth care they need.

I hope this enquiry brings about change so trauma like myself and my family experienced becomes a thing of the past.