

Submission
No 430

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

In August 2021, I was told my baby girl no longer had a heartbeat at 23 weeks. The days following that devastating news were obviously traumatic, having to be induced and deliver her naturally. I got to hold her for a brief moment and then I was told I had to deliver the placenta. I tried laying down, standing over the toilet but it wasn't coming out. A doctor tried to manually remove it and this was incredibly painful and hard for both my husband and Mum to watch. After a while, I suppose due to loosing a lot of blood it was decided that I go into theatre to have it removed. As I was being prepared to go into theatre, my blood pressure dropped, and I became a little unresponsive. Doctors and nurses filled the room and they remained with me until I was stable enough to go into theatre. The placenta was removed and the days that followed in hospital were extremely difficult.

I was told by the hospital to not try again for a few months. I had to wait for the interim autopsy results to come back and allow my body to get back to some kind of normal. I got the all clear to start trying again and thought that getting pregnant would be the easy part as I got pregnant the first month of trying. 6 months passed and I was struggling emotionally and had a lot of anxiety. I had been to my GP numerous times within those 6 months expressing my concerns. She suggested I go back to the hospital and discuss my concerns with them.

In June 2022, I went and saw the obstetrician/gynaecologist I had seen in November 2021. I voiced my concerns, and she said that stress wasn't good when trying to conceive, I'm lucky to have a period because stress can make it disappear and that invasive testing wasn't recommended until I had been trying for a year. All she suggested was to have an pelvic ultrasound.

I left that appointment feeling as though it was my fault, I wasn't pregnant because I was so anxious and stressed all of the time. I went and had the ultrasound and all it showed that I was ovulating (I already knew this from previous blood work done with my GP).

In August of 2022, I had to go back to the hospital for the conclusive autopsy results for my daughter. A year had passed, and I was not pregnant. Again, I voiced my concerns and again feel as though I wasn't heard. I was told to have a month off trying because most women who do this, fall pregnant the next month. It was also reiterated that the invasive testing wasn't necessary until I had been trying for a year. She told me that she would be very surprised if I wasn't pregnant by December/January. I left that appointment feeling angry and I decided to go back to my GP. My GP referred me to a specialist, and I waited until November 2022 for that appointment. I went to that appointment with my husband, and she told us that she couldn't provide us with advice until we had some tests done. At this point, my husband and I decided to take a break from actively trying as our mental health wasn't great and our relationship needed to be prioritised. For a year, we had been living the same month over on repeat.

In February of 2023, my husband had a sperm analysis and I had blood work and a HyCoSy done. We returned to the specialist, and everything was normal except for the HyCoSy. It showed that I had scar tissue in my uterus, and it was explained that this was potentially why I hadn't fallen pregnant. The medical term is Asherman's Syndrome. Having scar tissue in your uterus impacts the fertilised egg implanting into the uterine wall due to the decreased space. The scar tissue had developed from the placenta being surgically removed. I underwent day surgery in March of 2023 to have it removed. I took medication and refrained from training for 6 weeks to let everything heal. My specialist was optimistic that I would fall pregnant within 6 months.

My husband and I started trying again in May 2023 and we found out we were pregnant in July 2023 (month 2 of trying again) Whilst I am so happy and grateful to be pregnant again, I have some suggestions for the health system to ensure that people like me who have a stillbirth are looked after appropriately postpartum.

People who experience stillbirth should be advised of the possible conditions that can develop after birth. Why was scar tissue and Asherman's Syndrome not mentioned to me? I went to the hospital twice in 2022 expressing my concerns to be told to wait until I had been trying for a year and then start doing tests. Why wasn't I heard? I do understand this is the normal protocol, but I had already been pregnant and had been through trauma and the added trauma of trying again every month was extremely difficult for us.

These tests should be recommended a few months after a stillbirth to ensure everything is normal. I strongly believe that the Hysteroscopy I underwent to remove the scar tissue is why I am pregnant today.