

Submission
No 458

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had my first baby at [REDACTED] Hospital [REDACTED] in December 2022.

I was passed from my GP into the care of the antenatal clinic at [REDACTED] at approximately 16 weeks. During my first appointment, I was denied a place at [REDACTED] Midwifery Group Practice due to a high BMI, despite being fit and healthy, as supported by all other metrics of health. This meant that I had to attend only the antenatal clinic at [REDACTED], seeing a different midwife or doctor every single time, denying me continuity of care.

I eventually developed anemia and hypertension and was medicated for both. The irony of being considered a high risk pregnancy due to this but not receiving continuity of care purely because I "had to" attend [REDACTED] clinic baffles me. Every appointment I would have to explain my history again as not one healthcare provider bothered to read my file. I received conflicting advice from each doctor, with one even telling me I shouldn't be taking blood pressure medication as he believed my hypertension to be "white coat syndrome", which I have to say I agree with. By the end of my pregnancy I was taking nearly 80 tablets a week for various things.

I could only attend the clinic on Fridays, both the doctors and receptionists were incredibly rigid and unsupportive of changing days even once.

I was encouraged to be induced at 39 weeks despite my blood pressure never reaching critical heights. I agreed, trusting that the doctors knew best, however, I now feel like my birth was over-medicalised.

I went in for the induction. After having the Cervadil for the day, my membranes were accidentally ruptured by a midwife conducting a very painful and rough cervical exam which meant that the second stage of the induction (the balloon) couldn't occur. I was told to go to bed on the ward and rest, which was welcome after waking up at 4am that morning to arrive at the hospital on time.

At about 8pm, I was told that we were going to start labour immediately due to testing positive for GBS - something I was not told prior during any of my antenatal appointments. We called my partner, went into the birth suite, discussed my hopes for the birth and commenced.

I used gas as pain relief and laboured for about 6 hours. An internal fetal heart rate monitor was inserted and eventually fell out. After that time, my dilation had not progressed much so I opted for an epidural which took over an hour to receive due to staffing issues. As the midwife prepared the room for the anesthesiologist, she rearranged the gas tubes between contractions. When she reconnected it, I took a breath and physically keeled over and almost fell off the bed. Until this point - hours upon hours of active induced labour, and the gas was NEVER TURNED ON. The dial on the machine had been turned all the way up with the midwife commenting several times how surprised she was that I wasn't "reacting poorly" to the gas by feeling nauseous. I had been breathing into an empty tube for almost 7 hours by this point with no pain relief. The dizziness I felt after each contraction? Not a reaction to the gas, but headspins due to breathing my own carbon dioxide for the duration of each contraction. I wonder how unhealthy it is for a fetus and a labouring mother to be deprived of oxygen for 45 seconds every few minutes?

I had never been in a birth suite before. I had never used nitrous oxide or any type of gas for pain management. I had no idea what it should taste like, smell like. But when the machine was finally on, I could smell and taste the gas, hear it running and the machine itself lit up! WHY did the midwife, who was with me for hours, make this monstrous oversight? Why was I left to suffer?

I had my epidural. They reattached the internal fetal heart rate monitor that had since fallen out and was discovered that baby's heart rate was critically low. I was prepped for an emergency C-section. The doctor explained the risks while I was barely conscious. I signed the form while barely being able to hold the pen (and I would do it again to save my baby, but that is not the point - I was not in a physical or mental state to make an informed choice).

In theatre, it was discovered that the epidural didn't take properly - the registrar had missed and I could still feel one side of my body. Now I was to have a general anaesthetic C-section. I was assured I would be awake within 5 minutes of my baby's birth.

I was awoken one and a half hours later, and I was awake for at least 15 minutes before someone brought my partner and baby to see me.

My baby had been born. I didn't get to hear his first cry, I didn't get the "it's a boy!" announcement as we decided to wait for birth to discover his sex, I didn't get to be the first person to hold him, I didn't get to see my partner cut the cord, I didn't get to see the placenta, that amazing organ that I grew to support my baby, I didn't get to establish breastfeeding in that golden hour... I still lament those things stolen from me.

I explicitly mentioned during my hopes for birth discussion that if I were unable to do immediate skin to skin with our baby for whatever reason, I wanted my partner to do that for us. That didn't happen. Yes, he held him and fed him colostrum I had collected earlier, but nobody suggested he do skin to skin and after the experiences we had had, he didn't think to and I do not blame him at all for that. Someone should have been there to support him too.

I do not remember meeting my baby for the first time. I was in a drug haze. I have photos of the experience, but my memories are almost non-existent.

On the recovery ward, most midwives were caring and helpful. But there was one woman who I had the misfortune of seeing two days in a row. I asked her to just check my baby's latch to see if it looked right. She didn't even look at me and just told me what number channel the breastfeeding station was on the hospital television. I know most midwives aren't lactation consultants, but some compassion would have been appreciated.

I am unbelievably thankful that both my baby and myself are healthy, but I still harbour sadness about the way that my antenatal care and birth transpired, the errors and over-medicalisation that I suffered and the experiences that were stolen from me. I firmly believe that my birth trauma impacted the immediate bonding between myself and my baby.

I refuse to birth again at [REDACTED] Hospital