

Submission
No 446

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I want to say that I don't think anyone who was working with me during the birth of my daughter in 2016 did anything to purposely make it a not so good experience. I think that there were several factors that could have been done differently, which would have led to such a difference in my ability to manage with my birth after the fact.

So, I was induced to have my baby as I had begun to feel less movements, and I was 40+5. I was given a stretch and sweep, and when that did not initiate labour, I went in to have balloons placed. During this appointment (15/6/16), I began to have tightenings in my stomach, and the midwives admitted me as they believed I would be in labour soon. That same evening, I was experiencing contractions every 3 minutes, and this eventually petered off at around 11pm to a few times per hour. I was told not to worry, and I would be induced via drip at 6am on the 16/6. My husband left to sleep and return the following day.

16/6 - 6am. I was taken to birth suite and induced with the drip. It took sometime to come into effect. After a few hours, contractions were coming thick and fast. At times my husband asked for the drip to be turned down because he was concerned that I was having intense contractions so frequently (at one point, only having 20 second break between them). I recall the obstetrician wanting to examine me to see how far I had dilated/check the baby as there didn't appear to be any progression. When he was unable to do so because I was having intense contractions whilst he was trying to insert his hand inside me to examine me - he said that he just needed to examine me and couldn't I hold still please? I physically could not hold still having a contraction, and with only 30 seconds between them - there was no time between to complete the check.

To help be able to complete his check, I was offered an epidural - after around 8 hours of induction with what they said was little progress. I had wanted an epidural before this point, but felt I couldn't ask for one, because when I had requested more than gas, I have been somewhat reprimanded by the midwife. I recall asking my husband to advocate for more pain relief which he did.

Once the epidural had been arranged and executed, the obstetrician examined me and realised my baby was a brow presentation. Quite rare, and very unlikely to be able to be born vaginally is what they told me. Very unlikely to be both vaginally, without risks of injury to us both. I asked to wait to see if position changed, and my OBGYN agreed it was safe to wait and see. *Me not really knowing about the aforementioned risks.

So, decision to move to CS delivery was discussed due to lack of any positional change. I was given forms I was too tired to be able to read, but needing my signature. It was rushed, I was scared (I'd never had surgery of any kind), I was aggressively shaking and could barely speak... then I was told my husband had to wait outside the theatre until someone else was ready. Luckily for me the anaesthetist took one look at me and said, he has to come with her she is not in a state to be alone.

I didn't feel pain. I felt an odd pressure. My daughter was born, they showed her to me over the curtain and set about stitching me up. I remember asking if she was ok, she didn't cry. I repeated myself, internally thinking "don't cry, don't lose it yet"... And then I recall the feeling of panic consuming me, and a moment later a cry. I have never felt more relief ever.

Then I was taken to recovery. I was so so tired and groggy. And I had my baby to look after. Skin to skin, I was terrified I would fall asleep and drop her. My husband was unable to be with me in recovery. I was told it's not safe to have your baby in the bed with you if you fall asleep - so make sure you don't. I felt like I had been hit by a train - I hadn't slept since waking up on the morning of the 15/6. I had been through 20 hours of contractions (albeit a slow start), and then a caesarian.

Then I was transferred back to the ward when recovery was done with me. I remember the midwife on duty trying to tell me what pain relief I would be taking and when. I looked at my husband, mum and best friend and said I can't seem to understand her. I knew she wasn't saying anything terribly complex, but I was so tired, so pumped full of all the medications I needed during the previous 36h. I was so terrified I wouldn't hear my baby in the night. I asked if my husband could stay with me to help - "no not allowed, he needs rest too you know" (and he did, but he was more together than I was). I reiterated that I didn't think I could wake up, and that I would like for my husband to be able to stay with me so that he could help me look after the baby. The midwife said no, that she would watch over the baby, but she would be taking her to the nurses station.

Her first night in the world, and I couldn't look after her. Bloody hell I thought what sort of mum was I going to be?! Was she scared? Was she confused about where I was? Was she hungry? Did she cry for me? Because I was physically incapable of staying awake, none of these thoughts came to me until the next day. When it was too late to change it.

On good days, I can recognise this for what it was. A really shit set of circumstances, which led to an experience of birth trauma. On not so good days I struggle with thoughts arising about whether someone who couldn't look after her baby when she was first born could ever be a good enough mum. And I'm still a work in progress on that one. I say all of this as a mental health clinician who has experience addressing these things with other mothers. Some simple changes would have led to a hugely different set of circumstances.

Having had earlier internal examinations would have shown the brow presentation, I might have had a CS earlier and been less exhausted. Being able to have my husband with me to help me for the first night would have made a world of difference to my outlook of being able to look after her - at the time, and ongoing as her mother. This is something I struggle with ongoing at times, my daughter is 7 now.