

Submission  
No 465

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I gave birth in Dec 2019 at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] (private).

I was due on the 28th December and my OB wanted to induce me. He pointed to research saying that babies were best born at 39 weeks and said I was a high risk patient given I was in my late 30s and it was an IVF baby.

I felt uneasy about this so did a lot of research to try and work out whether I wanted to induce or not. It was really difficult to find information that could guide me. So in the end, I decided to listen to my OB. Surely, he must know best? After all, that was why I was paying thousands of dollars for private care.

I had a stretch and sweep on the night of the 27th Dec and then my waters broken early on the morning of the 28th Dec. Labour came on thick and fast. I laboured for a couple of hours without pain relief. I was only 4 cms dilated. I was vomiting with the pain so ended up getting an epidural.

By the end of the day, I had dilated enough that I could start pushing which went on for an hour or so. In the end, the OB said my baby's heart rate was raised and she needed to come out with forceps and an episiotomy.

I was badly injured. My baby was too by the forceps and spent a couple of days in NICU. The midwives in the postnatal ward were fantastic and quite concerned about my recovery. I was in hospital for 5 days. I had trouble full emptying my bladder when they removed the catheter so they put it back in but even the second time, I couldn't fully empty but the midwives seemed ok with this result and didn't explain anything more.

I couldn't sit without a rubber ring for months. I had urges when I needed to do a poo and knew I needed to get to a toilet immediately because I couldn't hold it in. I had an accident once.

I've been seeing a women's health physio regularly for 3 years and she has helped me enormously with my recovery. I've spent thousands of dollars in the process. We investigated tears with 3d scans as she suspected there was something more than just an episiotomy due to the impact of my injuries but there was none. I followed a program of pelvic floor muscle training.

But when I returned to gentle exercise, I suffered a prolapse. I've continued with the physio and we've done pelvic release work and tried pessaries. I had surgery in mid 2021 to fix up my back passage using my own skin. I don't think it's made much of a difference. My organs bulge into my vagina when I cough or sneeze. I will never be able to return to running or high impact exercise.

I also have issues with my bladder - I leak, wake up regularly throughout the night with urges to wee and I can't fully empty. I've been seeing a urogynecologist along with my women's health physio for my treatment. I wear period undies every day for protection. I had to recently go to emergency because my bladder was so full, I couldn't empty, and they had to catheterise me. I've now been taught how to self-catherise in case that happens again. This has all happened since the birth.

My prolapse and bladder problems impact me every day. They've effected my ability to exercise, my mental health, my sense of self. I've spent thousands of dollars accessing care I need with a women's health physio. I'm now also seeing a psychologist to help me as well because I think about it all the time.

The birth class I did at [REDACTED] touched very briefly on inductions and interventions. But it was largely focused on having a normal vaginal birth. It did not prepare me for the cascade of interventions and the impact they can have on my body. It did not explain that after a certain point, the baby descends too far down the birth canal and you can't have a c-section. It did not mention the pelvic floor or injuries such as prolapse or urinary incontinence. I'd never heard the word prolapse before! It spoke about the longer recovery time with c-sections

but didn't talk about the recovery time following forceps, which is far longer with far greater injuries that impact women for the rest of their lives.

I was blindsided by my injuries. I am a university educated woman who read widely about birth and did my hospital weekend birth class. But I wish I never had the induction which I believe led me down a cascade of other interventions. And I wish I knew more about forceps and the injuries they can have on a woman's pelvic floor. And I wish I was given the option when my labour wasn't progressing for an emergency c-section. But I didn't have enough information to make informed choices.

Women should be given the knowledge. I think there is a view that we can't tell women everything otherwise they'll be too scared to try for a vaginal birth. Women want to know so we can make the choice about what's best for our body rather than leaving it in the hands of an OB, who we try and trust as knowing best, but frankly I think mine was more concerned about returning to his family over the Xmas break than my wellbeing.

There should be efforts to limit the usage of forceps to only emergency situations given what the research shows in terms of injuries to a woman's pelvic floor.

And all women should be given access to Medicare-funded pelvic physio sessions during pregnancy and after birth to prevent and treat pelvic floor injuries. I've spent thousands. I worry for the women who can't do this and what they are just putting up with as a consequence of childbirth.

We can reduce birth trauma with better birth education, limiting the use of forceps, stopping the demonisation of c-sections, funding continuity of care so we can increase the support midwives offer and providing medicare-funded women's health physio sessions to all women.