

Submission  
No 489

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

The birth of my first born was as a woman the most exciting experience I felt blessed to have the opportunity to go through, I was excited about giving birth - to feel the empowerment and connection I had heard so much about from mothers before me. This is not however how our birth went. I had learnt about the cascade of interventions in our education leading up to the birth and being a health care professional myself thought that I had the knowledge to speak up when interventions did not align with my wishes. Even before the birth my voice was not heard or supported when providing the midwives with my birth preferences which I came to learn no one had read. Even the midwife who had been caring for us throughout the entire pregnancy - so how could they ever support me, my partner and baby through a birth in which we felt psychologically and emotionally supported, something that is vital to better birth outcomes.

The birth of my child started with an unnecessary induction at 41 weeks which I knew in my education that a 40 week due date was an absolute guess, an outdated tool of measurement in which pregnancy will be two weeks before or after that date. However the hospital chose to induce me for no medical reason, baby and I were healthy and happy. This was the first part of the birth experience I felt was taken from me, going into labour spontaneously and being the one to share that news with my partner and experience that together for the first time. Instead we were admitted to the hospital the day before, we're given terrible food which was most certainly not supporting anyone's nutritional needs before going into labour and birthing. We were picked up at 6am in the morning by the nurse and the induction process started.

Pitocin was used by inserting a cannula into my hand which stayed with me for the entirety of the labour and birth, the room was old and uncomfortable and I had to manoeuvre the IV pole and all its cords around with me with a constant stinging in my hand while attempting to get comfortable and relaxed - this was impossible. The bath in the room was so shallow the water would only come up to cover the legs if you were sitting down, impossible to facilitate a water birth which is what I had wanted - again no one cared. I also had foetal monitoring occurring through the entire labour which meant the nurse would constantly come and readjust the monitor when the reading would drop out interfering with any progress on the psychological process of the labour.

The midwife did not offer any support, suggestion or strategies to try to relax and progress the labour, she sat and watched the monitor. I was left to ask if it wasn't too early to try some gas after 3-4 hours of contractions. After 5 hours of intense contractions which lasted 1-2mins with 30 seconds in between them I began to spiral unable to control my mindset with barely any reprieve between contractions and my partner who's first birth it was also although had gone to the education with me and was fully supportive of the birth preferences didn't know what and when to try to help as I was not willing to receive help from him being in so much pain. The pitocin made these contractions so painful and close together they were impossible to imagine going through for another unknown amount of hours.

When the midwife checked me (which I had said in my preferences I didn't want) I hadn't progressed any further from the 2.5cms dilated that I was when I first walked in the door. This broke me. I requested the epidural. After the epidural I wasn't able to move on the bed, I couldn't even turn myself and there were even more cords in my way. I was assisted to turn twice in the next 5 hour from one side to the other - not supportive repositioning to the knees or pillows between the knees to widen the hips - nothing. At 5pm the midwife wanted to check me again and so I was turned to my back.

At this time I started shaking uncontrollably and vomiting, I was fully dilated however this was when baby's heart rate dropped and mine increased causing the midwife to hit the emergency buzzer. Many people came in and out of the room and checked me male and female doctors (male doctors which I had a preference not to be involved). As I had been on my side for half the day not moving and now flat on my back with my legs up (yes legs up and undercovered as nurses and doctors stood at the end of the bed and discussed what to do) baby obviously wasn't able to move down the birth canal as freely and wasn't able to turn. They said his head was stuck and they might do an episiotomy which on my birth preferences I specifically said no to.

The doctors proceeded multiple time to try and turn him at which time I was told if they can't turn him I would have to have a caesarean - all the while I was still vomiting and shaking uncontrollably while my partner didn't even feel like he could stand next to me because of the people in the way. I had no psychological or emotional support. They instructed me to push which I was so excited to do even in my state, excited that maybe I could push my baby out and lift him up onto my chest and feel him and touch him and love him even deeper for the very first time having gone through all the pain and interventions to get to him. But no, the pushing was unsuccessful - I was still on my back with my legs up, compressing my pelvis. No one suggested or attempted position changes to facilitate a wider pelvis and allow babies head to move. When taken to the theatre for the caesarean it was about 745pm (from 5pm until now it had been many people intervening and speaking to me about interventions all while I vomited and shook) it took a long time for the anaesthesiologist to achieve the appropriate surgical block to perform the caesar.

This whole time I was unable to advocate for myself being in the throws of labour pain, vomiting and shaking - my partner did not have the confidence as a first time father to know when to speak up or what to ask for, to ask for alternative options. Unable to advocate for myself in a system which did not have the time or policy to allow for the proper emotional support which a safe and successful birth demands. No one came near me in the theatre not even the midwife I layed there while so many people just went about their business like I wasn't even there. At 831pm (over 12 hours after the induction commenced) my son was cut from my stomach while I layed with my arms laid out still shaking uncontrollably from all of the medications. He was pulled up by the surgeon for us to see. Someone else was the first person to touch my baby, someone else was the person to cut our umbilicord which tied us together his life source and not his father, a second person and then a third or fourth were to touch him and hold him before me, his mother, while he was taken to the next room to be check and wrapped and beanie put on before being brought finally to me, his mother.

I didn't get to pull my son onto my chest skin to skin and touch him, hold him, smell him, kiss him for the first time. Instead he was wrapped up and brought to me and held next to my face when he started crying and I had a few moments with him before he was given to his father to be taken else Where for skin to skin. The golden hour was non-existent, I was left to be stitched up alone on the operating table while I still shook uncontrollably for 4 hours now. When I was taken to recovery my son was finally brought back to me, but I wasn't able to sit up to hold him properly as my blood pressure was far too low from a 1.5L blood loss from the caesarean. It wasn't until we were taken to our room 3 hours after his birth that we got our skin to skin contact and first feed.

This was still just the beginning of the trauma we experienced the recovery from a caesarean, its effects on breastfeeding, its effects on our son's health and the deep scarring physically and emotionally from all that happened in the induction, labour and birth - all that I didn't want but still did happen - out of my control. A birth experience of medical and surgical intervention when birth should be a beautiful, empowering rite of passage into motherhood - I feel it was taken from me, my son and partner, to experience what a uniting family transition it should be. In the sleepless nights of the first year it's all I would think about when I couldn't sleep and then it would be the thing keeping me awake, not the baby.

Thinking about why did they do this or why didn't they do that, I didn't get the chance to experience this or that. The scar of the caesarean is a constant painful reminder. It makes me angry still 2 years later. My next birth will be a home birth. The medical system is not the place for birthing women, it creates problems where there are none. The system must change, the rates of caesarean section are out of control, it is unacceptable. Generations of birthing women are having their power taken from them and their babies, the trauma that comes with this is life long and cannot be undone. I only hope this trauma is not passed to our future generation of mothers.