

Submission
No 513

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 10 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

Overview

My submission relates to my experience in hospital for the birth of my baby, mainly disrespectful treatment during the labour/birth process. Pregnancy care and after care were positive experiences for me.

My overall issue relates to the way my pain was handled. It felt like my pain wasn't taken seriously, for approximately 14 hours, which resulted in my planned Caesarean becoming an emergency caesarean because I reached 9cm dilated cervix. I was left feeling as though I was putting it all on, that my pain wasn't as bad as I was saying/feeling.

I gave birth in a [REDACTED] hospital in regional Victoria in March 2021. I now live in NSW.

Details

I was booked in for a planned caesarean, as advised by my gynaecologist due to previous women's health issues and surgeries I have had.

I was advised throughout pregnancy by my GP/OB that if I went into labour early I should present to the hospital as early as possible so that the caesarean can take place. I was pretty anxious about this and confirmed this information several times.

I went into spontaneous labour a week earlier than my planned caesarean date.

I went to the maternity ward at my local hospital with my partner at approx. 7pm after phoning as I was having tummy pains that I believed may have been the start of labour (my first pregnancy). I was welcomed in and put in a birthing suite to be examined/monitored.

The machine with the belly straps for monitoring myself and the baby were put on and they kept an eye on me. As the pain progressed I was offered gas and air (which I used) and told it was probably an irritated uterus and may not be labour so they'll just keep an eye on it and it'll likely settle down. I was having 2-3 (what I assumed were) contractions within 10mins from when I arrived at the hospital, I had timed them at home before calling.

This went on for some time. My cervix was checked and there was no progress in dilation so the machine was left strapped to my belly and I went through each contraction. At some point I was offered morphine and a sleeping tablet to help me get some rest. The contractions continued similarly and the pain relief helped a little.

From my experience during the 14hours, the midwife who was with me for about the second half did not seem to take my pain seriously. When my cervix was checked it was done so without consideration for how it felt. I was in a lot of pain and I had to stop her to request she go slower and work with my breathing to accommodate for my pelvic pain/vaginismus. I needed to mention this to every person who checked. My cervix was checked by another midwife earlier and a doctor without as much pain.

At one point I was offered to get in the shower if I wanted, to which I replied 'I don't know', because I wasn't sure where I was at with labour, or if this was labour, as I had been repeatedly told that it probably wasn't, and I wasn't prepared to have to manage labour pain. I didn't know if a shower would help, or if it would all suddenly stop and I'd be heading home. I hadn't been in labour before so was being guided by the staff.

The midwife left the room a number of times (which I assumed is normal as there are other patients on the ward). On a couple of these occasions I was having very strong pains and pressed the call button so assistance, I let the midwife know that I was 'really struggling' but was met with no/little sympathy or encouragement. When one of the two morphine

injections were given, she commented that I was 'a bit jumpy', as though I was a bit of a sook about the needle being given.

The final check of my cervix was completed around 8/9am the morning after I was admitted and I was told I was 9cm dilated. My partner was the one who noticed the bloody show/mucus plug that was now on the bed sheets leading up to this. The previous check showed no dilation/very little; it was very early in the morning when the previous check was done. I was given medication to stop the contractions and was rushed down to the theatre to prepare for an emergency caesarean. I was both surprised, and later angered, that my planned surgery became an emergency as I had attended the hospital so early to avoid that happening, as advised by my doctor. Conversations around calling the on-call team in earlier seemed brushed aside/avoided as they would be in by morning anyway.

I went home after 4 days of almost no sleep. I had already been awake for 24 hours when the caesarean took place and then that was it, and I didn't have the support of my partner overnight in the hospital where nurses and midwives were not always available to help me lift our baby out of the cot when needed with my post-surgery tummy. I actually fell asleep mid conversation when a midwife was going through the discharge information.

I would like to note that the Caesarean surgery itself was a positive experience (although going into surgery was rushed due to the emergency). All the doctors and midwives in the theatre were lovely and made my partner and I feel comfortable.

I submitted a formal complaint to the hospital and received a reply stating that the relevant people would be spoken to, and they apologised for any distress caused.

My labour and birth experience has definitely contributed to the decision to not have any more children. My child is now 2.5 years old and I still think about the experience often and it makes me feel quite mad honestly.