

Submission
No 528

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My wife gave birth to our son in April 2018 at [REDACTED] Hospital in [REDACTED]. We lived in [REDACTED] at the time and we would see the midwife at [REDACTED] Hospital several times prior to the birth but with that hospital not having a maternity ward we had to go to [REDACTED] for the birth.

We found the midwives at [REDACTED] to be quite kind, friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and competent in their role but one particular question we had was whether we should have a planned caesarean as my wife's sister had two children this way where she was told she wouldn't be able to give birth naturally (due to size and shape of pelvis area and size of the baby etc). My wife being Asian and quite small and myself Caucasian and quite tall also made us concerned about this as well as the size of her tummy indicating that the baby would be quite large. We were told that there was nothing that could be really done there as far as planning a caesarean and we would just have to see how things go when having the baby naturally.

My wife was then overdue by close to 2 weeks by the time we were arranged to book in with [REDACTED] hospital to be induced if the baby had not started coming by that time. We were due to go to the hospital on a Monday (which would have been about 2 weeks late at that time) however my wife started having contractions late on the Friday night just before this. These contractions started relatively small and far apart and we were due to see the midwife in [REDACTED] the Saturday morning so we decided to wait until then rather than go to the hospital in [REDACTED] (45 minutes away) in the middle of the night. When we saw the midwife in [REDACTED] the Saturday morning she said that my wife had not dilated much and would not be ready for birth yet. She said it might be best to stay home in [REDACTED] for the time being until the contractions became more frequent etc. So we went home and my wife continued to have contractions throughout the day and these became stronger and more frequent in the late afternoon. So we decided we would drive to the hospital in [REDACTED] then rather than leave it any later and potentially have to drive up in the middle of the night.

Luckily at that time my parents lived in [REDACTED] so we knew that we could stay there if required. We went to [REDACTED] Hospital at around dinner time on the Saturday night and they checked over my wife but said that she had still not dilated enough to deliver the baby. They said to go home and just have panadol and to come back the next day where they could arrange to deliver the baby then. So we stayed at my parents' house but my wife did not sleep through the night at all (and had not slept for most of the Friday night since the contractions had started) and so by Sunday morning when we went back to the hospital and they said they could potentially start to look at delivering the baby I explained that my wife was exhausted at that time and would have no energy to be able to deliver a baby and required some rest. They agreed and gave her a sedative to put her to sleep where she slept for a few hours that afternoon in hospital and woke up around dinner time on the Sunday. They then said given the time and my wife still being tired that they would give her another sedative to sleep through the Sunday night and then would look to deliver the baby on the Monday.

I was allowed to sleep with my wife in the hospital that Sunday night on a chair next to the bed that apparently is allowed for partners the night before giving birth (but not after birth). The next morning (now Monday) we then went into the delivery room to have the baby. My wife had continued to have contractions through all of this time prior to then (although once having sedatives this dulled them to the point my wife could sleep). We were basically left to ourselves in the delivery room, shown the bath that could be used and the gas that could be used to assist with pain but nothing done as far as inducement to try to bring the birth along (and no talk of a caesarean at that time). We had asked about an epidural where we were told that this could be given at some point if required but to see how things went first.

A few hours went by where not much was happening as far as dilating but my wife continued to be in more and more pain with contractions and starting to feel more and more exhausted given the time that had elapsed (including the days prior). Then in the mid afternoon they agreed to give her an epidural but this took a couple of hours for the doctor to come to give it. By that time my wife had become very weak and they were struggling to put the needle in her spine. At one point they looked at me ready to give up and I said that they better do it otherwise she had no hope of getting through this with the pain etc so they then managed to. Once this was done my wife then felt more comfortable not feeling any pain but also not dilating near enough to be able to deliver the baby.

Then in the mid to late afternoon there started to be concerns about the baby where it was showing that his heart rate was stopping and starting again which they said could be from the umbilical cord being wrapped around his neck which was cutting his breathing when the contractions were happening. They then started to monitor his body temperature and see if there was any distress happening. By late afternoon (close to dinner time by now) they were concerned to the point that they thought we should have an emergency caesarean to get him out. We were glad to hear this just to be able to hopefully get him out safely and also relieve my wife of the ordeal of trying to deliver him for close to 72 hours at this point (since contractions first started).

When they delivered the baby (and I was in the operating room) my son was covered in feces, which I was later told by a retired midwife that I know, that this is an indicator of distress for the baby (this wasn't really explained at the time by the midwives or doctors). When delivered it was also confirmed that the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck. My wife was struggling to breathe once my son was taken out of her so they put her on oxygen and took our baby and I out of the room. I was then left alone with him for around 1.5 hours where a couple of times a nurse came in (one to jab him with a needle and the other noticed he was still quite dirty with blood, feces, etc on him so assisted with bathing him for me). Other than that I was left alone in the room with him not knowing how my wife was going. Given the trauma she had gone through that day (and the couple prior) I did start to have grave concerns for my wife and would have greatly appreciated being told she was ok. After over an hour and me asking I was told she was ok but just recovering and being monitored given she was struggling to breathe etc.

She was then wheeled back to the room at around 9pm and was doing ok (tired and weak but breathing ok etc). We were then together in the room for the next hour where during that time the nurses started to show her how to breast feed and were being quite helpful and compassionate where they said I could stay as long as we wanted. At 10pm it was the changeover of staff and the midwife that then came in told me abruptly that I couldn't stay any longer and I needed to leave (10pm was the usual time visitors needed to leave). It didn't seem like a proper handover had happened where she had been informed of what we'd just gone through and when I tried to explain she was very dismissive basically laughing off that my wife could have been having contractions for 3 days prior to the baby being delivered etc. My wife didn't want me to leave and wanted me to stay the night with her there but we were told that wasn't possible and I would have to leave so I reluctantly left and felt completely in shock of what had transpired that day and in fear of how my wife and baby were going to be throughout the night without my support.

I stayed at my parents' house and then came back the next morning where my wife and baby were doing ok but having issues with breastfeeding (with my wife not producing much milk and having trouble with him latching on etc). The midwives were fairly patient and helpful but also quite busy given other babies in the ward etc. They did have little baby formula bottles that they were using to ensure my son got enough milk and we were comfortable with this but still trying with the breastfeeding. At one point in the next couple of days a lady did drop by and see me while in hospital to talk through what had happened with the delivery etc. She was nice enough but didn't really want to know my explanation of what happened and in hindsight it just seemed like it was covering themselves where she basically told me that they didn't do anything wrong.

I'm not finger pointing at anyone in particular (the rude midwife was a bit of a last straw given what we'd just gone through) however we tried to take all the correct precautions, ask the right questions etc but these largely fell on deaf ears as far as having a planned caesarean, allowed to stay in hospital on the Saturday night (and/or given sedatives so my wife could sleep), provided sufficient support during the delivery, provided an epidural in a timely manner, provided an emergency caesarean in a timely manner, provided sufficient support after the birth and compassion given the ordeal for me to be there to support my wife and child for longer.

We also weren't really informed of things such as there being a lot of mucus still inside the baby's lungs etc as being a caesarean where if it's a natural birth a lot of this gets pushed out of their lungs etc at the time of delivery. So our baby would vomit a lot after having any milk for at least a week after he was born (only later it was told to me by a midwife when doing a home check).

So all of this ordeal made having our baby an extremely traumatic and terrifying event where it was one of the scariest moments of my life and not one of the best days or memories of my life like it should be. As pointed out above this could have been a much better experience with better support provided along the way. The experience was bad enough that it had

turned us off the thought of having more children as we did not want to go through a similar experience again (and we never wanted to go back to [REDACTED] Hospital for any reason as felt poorly looked after and bad vibes from the experience).

Having a maternity ward in [REDACTED] would help with this scenario as luckily in my case I had family I could stay with at the time but if all this had happened and I had to travel back to [REDACTED] 45 mins away (being kicked out of the room at 10pm after a traumatic birth in particular but also travelling back and forth each day while they were in hospital or having to stay at a motel nearby) then the whole situation would have been even more difficult and traumatic. I believe this also leads into the situation we had where with [REDACTED] Hospital having to service such a large region we could not get in quickly once overdue to have our son induced (being 2 weeks late by the time it happened) and being understaffed etc where the proper support and attention could not be provided.

We were relieved that we managed to get through the whole ordeal with everyone alive and healthy. But it did take a toll on our mental health and not get things off to a great start with us as parents etc.

Sadly my wife passed away nearly 3 years later from a brain aneurysm where she went into a coma and the brain damage was so bad that she could not survive it. She was in ICU at [REDACTED] Hospital in [REDACTED] and although this was also a terrible thing to go through with a horrible outcome of my wife not surviving, the hospital was well resourced, provided overnight rooms that we could stay in on site, had extremely competent and compassionate staff that did an amazing job of giving my wife every chance to survive and made the difficult decisions around turning off life support etc easier for us giving us time to make these decisions as a family when everybody was ready to accept it etc (with my wife's parents also being there that don't speak English and they even provided an interpreter to help explain things etc).

So I can see how the medical system can get it right in NSW and we just need the regional hospitals to have a bit more support provided to it (facilities, staffing, etc) so that they are not left way behind the cities.

I appreciate you giving the opportunity to provide this feedback and although it is not pleasant for me to relive the experience of both the childbirth and also the death of my wife. I hope that this feedback can assist with some improvements being made to the NSW health system. I am glad to say that my son is healthy and happy. I have not provided our names in this submission out of respect to my late wife.