

Submission
No 530

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My first pregnancy I had a quick birth but was left for 2 hours with babies head in the birth canal and came out with a cone on his head. The midwives refused to check my cervix as I was under a private OB.

My second pregnancy I arrived at [REDACTED] Hospital as my waters had ruptured (consistent with my first birth). I was pushed by an older midwife to go home and told that that is what is best. It didn't feel right so I refused. I was only 2 cm dilated but knew it was going to be quick. I had irregular contractions. A midwife came in and told me that I had to take a sleeping tablet because I need rest but in the same sentence told me that she and the other midwives had made bets on when I would give birth and she guess 4.30am (only 4 hrs after the sleeping tablet was given). I felt pressured so took it. No one checked on me after this. I was left alone in a room labouring on my own with a partner who was unwell from the COVID vaccine. At 4.45am my waters broke. I sat up screaming and I felt my baby drop into the birth canal. One midwife came in followed by others. I was told to calm down and I freaked out about my babies heart rate. I screamed that I can feel the head coming out.

My clothes were instantly ripped off me (I was fully clothed) and by 4.52am I had given birth. During the birth I was given gas which I was later told wasn't even on. When my baby was born I completely dissociated. I couldn't stop shaking. I had never taken a sleeping tablet before and felt completely detached. My mind was sedated but my body was ramped up. I then was given extra medication to birth my placenta. At this stage I couldn't hold my baby. I was completely shut down and in shock. Having had my clothes stripped off and been completely alone had triggered me significantly. I told midwives I was dissociating and all I was told was that it was a record quick birth. I still couldn't stop shaking. I was never given emotional support after this. I was moved into a room with other mothers and left on my own again. I asked for a lactation consultant and this was never done. My baby had some extra problems with jaundice which took my focus. Again, I was given no psychological support, no referrals and no social work support. They hospital had my file which outline my own history and what I needed regarding consent and triggers.

I am a psychologist that supports mothers and others and was horrified at the lack of awareness, trauma informed responses and support for me during what was a horrific experience. I was treated like a bet and a number, given medication that hindered my mental state (despite one of the midwives being so confident that I would give birth only hours later - which I did). I understand how urgent it was that my clothes be stripped off as I could feel their panic but my partner was shoved to the side and he could of helped by doing that. I hope other mothers don't experience what I have in that hospital again. After this experience I suffered from post traumatic experiences and was only given support months later when I saw a GP that specialised in supporting parents and children. The experience impacted on my initial bond and skin to skin with my baby. It impacted on my breastfeeding journey and I also suffered from post natal depression and anxiety.

As a psychologist I would put forth the following recommendations:

- screening, documenting and processes regarding birth trauma.
- mandatory education for all maternity staff in birth trauma and trauma more broadly.
- funding for debriefing services for those who have experienced birth trauma. This support should be followed up and repeated at different points during the postpartum journey/period.
- better communication and documentation that allows staff to understand clients existing risk factors for birth trauma.
- better referral processes for social work support.
- Access to a perinatal mental health professional (counsellor or psychologist) to include one to one support and consulting for staff.