

Submission
No 531

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I suffered birth trauma with the birth of my second son in 2021. I was scheduled to have a caesarean section because I had had an emergency caesarean section with my first son in 2018 and I was not willing to risk uterine rupture by having a VBAC.

My waters broke at 36 weeks and 6 days so I presented to the birthing suites. My obstetrician was on annual leave and I was told that Dr ■ was the obstetrician on duty and would care for my baby and I.

I was given intravenous steroids to help strengthen my baby's lungs because, at 36 & 6, he was considered premature. Dr ■ told me that she would perform my caesarean section in the morning unless I went into labour earlier.

I went into labour throughout the night so I asked Dr ■ for my caesarean section.

Dr ■ said that she wanted to delay my caesarean section for a few hours to allow the baby to receive more of the steroids. She told me that she was about to go to theatre to deliver another baby by caesarean section and that, after that, she would perform mine.

My contractions increased in intensity and frequency. I felt frustrated because I was in so much pain and knew the end result was going to be a caesarean section so I just wanted it done.

After a few hours, Dr ■ returned and performed a vaginal exam. She told me I was only 3cm dilated and that she would wait until I was further along before she'd perform the caesarean section. I was surprised I wasn't more dilated because of how intense my contractions were. I told Dr ■ that I was in a lot of pain and asked her to please take me to theatre now. Dr ■ said that she wanted the baby to have more steroids before the birth and said I wasn't even in active labour and that I needed to wait. By this stage, it was the next morning so my baby was 37 weeks anyway.

I became very upset and begged Dr ■ to perform my caesarean section. She simply said 'No', turned and left the room.

I felt powerless, like I had no say in how my birth would play out. I felt weak, because my contractions were so painful but I wasn't even in 'real' labour. I felt afraid because, if this wasn't even active labour, how much worse was the pain going to become?

Shortly after Dr ■ left the room, I had the urge to go to the toilet. I felt like I had to empty my bowels so my husband and the two midwives helped me into the bathroom. I pushed but I could not pass any stools.

The midwives came back in and I told them I desperately had to empty my bowels but nothing was happening. They looked at each other, then one of them said 'We know you were only just examined 20 minutes ago but can we take another look?'

They helped me back to the bed and performed another vaginal examination. The midwife told me that she could see my baby's head. She told me she was going to get the crib and blankets and asked me to start pushing. I didn't understand at first and I slowly realised I was going to give birth vaginally. I was terrified of my uterus rupturing as this was the reason I'd scheduled a caesarean.

After about three waves of pushing with contractions, my son was born. He was unresponsive so the midwives gave him oxygen and performed chest compressions. Finally his condition improved and he was put on my chest. Because of his rough start, he spent the first two days in the special care nursery and was given formula because he was too tired and weak to breastfeed initially.

Dr [REDACTED] wasn't present at the birth and came into the room when my son was on my chest. She did not apologise for not performing my caesarean earlier and in fact seemed smug and said words to the effect of 'All's well that ends well'.

I am grateful to the two midwives who delivered my son and saved his life and listened to me when I told them what my body was telling me.

I will never know if my son would have been in a better condition had I delivered him earlier into my labour by caesarean section, but I do know that I was made to feel powerless and out of control by Dr [REDACTED]

While my son and I are safe, it's not as simple as 'all's well that ends well'. A woman's emotional and mental well-being during birth matters.