

Submission
No 532

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 9 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

As a Registered Nurse, I had full faith in the system that I would birth feeling supported and advocated for. I chose care under a private obstetrician in a busy private hospital in Sydney. I trusted my OB, and in hindsight can see that I was coerced into an unwarranted induction for pregnancy related hypertension. Throughout my pregnancy, I had continued to have elevated blood pressure readings when my OB took the readings in his rooms. We discussed a plan for me to check my own BP at home, to which throughout my entire pregnancy, every reading I took at home was completely normal. I continued to inform my OB my readings were normal, and he agreed it was likely white coat hypertension, but to be on the safe side I went on to have a 24 hour blood pressure monitor placed to see how the readings were over that period of time. The report was sent to my OB, and we discussed it in one of my final appointments that yes, I did in fact have white coat hypertension, and the abnormally high readings were likely a result of my doctor being in a position of authority which elevated my blood pressure.

At my 37 week appointment, my OB recommended an induction because he was worried that I would develop preeclampsia if my pregnancy continued to full term (40+ weeks). This was not founded on any evidence, but I was in a vulnerable position where I was unaware of the risks of an induction and the cascade of intervention which may follow, and I was excited to finally be meeting my baby. He told me about the steps of an induction, what I could expect, but never was I told about all the interventions which would now be more likely to occur during the induction. This in hindsight, was not informed consent.

I arrived for my induction, had two rounds of prostaglandin gel inserted, and began having minor cramping. My OB was called in to break my waters as I was 3cm dilated, and then he left the room. The midwife looking after me helped me to the bathroom to put on a pad and underwear, and for the next 10 minutes contractions started on their own, and were strong. She could see on the CTG monitor I was having regular contractions, and told me this was a great sign, and perhaps we could hold off on the syntocinon drip for a little bit to see if my contractions continued to progress. At that point, my OB walked back in, and my midwife asked him if we could withhold the syntocinon for a little while as I was having good contractions. He bypassed me, didn't make eye contact, and told her no. I was a bystander in that decision, and I felt unable to advocate for myself. He had a set formula he wanted to follow, and I was there along for the ride. There was no collaborative decision making.

The syntocinon drip was started, my OB left, and my contractions went from zero to 100 with an intense amount of pain. I have never felt more blindsided in my life, and I wish I had done more birth education, but I also was paying a lot of money for a private obstetrician to care for me. Information and education around my birth and the effects and risks of interventions like this were never mentioned in our appointments. He was not there for my labour, so he didn't feel the need to educate me about it. I laboured through this intense pain eventually to decide to get an epidural. I will add here now, that I am an Anaesthetic Registered Nurse, meaning that I have lots of experience and knowledge around epidurals, their benefits, risks, and complications.

The anaesthetist arrived, was very quick to place the needle in and administer the medication and connect me to the continuous infusion, however as soon as my midwife helped me back to lying in bed I knew something was wrong. I was completely paralysed from my armpits down, with no movement or sensation. I asked the midwife to stop the infusion, this wasn't a correctly placed epidural. She left the room and brought back the midwife in charge, who told me I knew too much, and was freaking out for no reason. I begged her to stop it, saying something was wrong, and she argued with me for around 10 minutes according to my husband. She said to me, "you'll be jumping off the bed screaming in pain if I stop it", I said to her, it's my body, I'll take the pain, but I know this is dangerous to keep it in and running as it wasn't an epidural. I knew that he had accidentally placed it in the spinal space, and had given me a dural puncture. I was having trouble breathing, I kept saying it felt like every time I dozed off I had to gasp for air, and not once did anyone come to assess me for a complication as a result of my epidural. I continued to feel completely paralysed from my armpits down for the next 4 hours, at which time I had birthed my son, and was being repaired for a Grade 1 tear. As soon as my OB began suturing I felt the pain of it immediately, but I had felt so dismissed, and unheard throughout my entire labour that I just thought to myself suck it up, it's almost over, and then you can be alone with your husband and baby.

I went on to then have difficulties breastfeeding, and had a Lactation Consultant see me on the postnatal unit who then said "of course you're having issues breastfeeding, you had an epidural". I continued to have issues during my hospital on the postnatal ward, where one night I was sobbing so much during an excruciating breastfeed, my husband called the midwife in to help and we asked if maybe I could have a break from breastfeeding to help heal my bloody and cracked nipples. This was Day 3. She told me I wasn't special, everyone experiences this pain, and I needed to just get through it. She refused to entertain my request for her to show me how to hand express or pump into a bottle, and said that if she did that then I would never breastfeed my baby and I would give up and just go to bottles forever.

I left hospital a shell of myself, now with a newborn needing all the love and connection from me which I was struggling so hard to find. I dreaded every feed, I wished he'd just keep sleeping so I didn't have to breastfeed him to avoid the pain. I went on to seek psychological help and was diagnosed with postnatal anxiety, I also saw an IBCLC who cost over \$2000 for all of the visits, and ended up weaning my baby from breastmilk to then get on top of my mental health. I grieved my breastfeeding journey for over 12 months, and the events of my birth are replayed in my mind frequently. I dream about future babies, what their births will look like, and I yearn for a chance to heal the trauma. This enquiry provides you with the greatest opportunity to overhaul a system so broken, which claims to be woman and baby centred but is so far from that. It's a revolving door, quick to dismiss the needs of the woman, quick to forget this is a life changing experience for them and their family, and has a one size fits all formula.