

Submission
No 540

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my daughter at the [REDACTED] Hospital in [REDACTED] a few years ago. There were a number of events during that time that I consider to be serious violations on my body, and where coercion and deception was used and consent was absent. I wish to focus in on one of the more egregious acts as a demonstration of what is considered standard practice in a hospital birth in Australia. It occurs to me now that both nurses and obstetricians are not only unfamiliar with, and unable to recognise, a normal physiologic birth when they are in its presence, but they are deeply distrustful of the process of birth itself, as well as birthing women.

I presented to the ward at a very early hour of the morning. My labour had started not long before, and my contractions were consistently three minutes apart. I was unable to stand due to the intensity. It was clear to me that birth was not far off. My private midwife was on her way to hospital. A woman who wasn't introduced to me and whom I'd never met prior asked me to get on the bed so she could assess my dilation. I said I didn't want to have my dilation assessed. I had not been in labour long, but the intensity and frequency of my contractions signalled to me that this was likely to be an efficient birth that would not be helped by having someones fingers inserted into my labouring body. This woman would not leave and repeated to insist despite my declining. All I wanted was to be left alone to labour.

I had gone into spontaneous labour, myself and my baby were healthy and strong, and labour had not long started. There was no reason for concern or intervention.

It got to a point where I was being towered over by this woman and other staff. They were not going to leave unless I consented to get up on the bed. Wanting more than anything to be left alone so I could concentrate on birthing my baby and having no breath or spare energy to continue advocating for myself, I got up on the bed. I was asked if my waters had broken. I told them that they had broken all over the floor in my bathroom at home and a couple more times at hospital. I even pointed to the puddle of water not too far from where this woman was standing. Then I was assaulted.

Despite my clear recollection and demonstration of my waters breaking, I was digitally penetrated with great force to ascertain my dilation, and then without my knowledge or consent, an instrument was inserted up my vaginal canal and through my cervix in an attempt to "break" my waters. She flatly confirmed that my waters had indeed already broken on their own. At this stage I had reared one of my legs up - my instinct to kick this person in the chest to protect myself. My partner restrained me. This nurse/ obstetrician who I had never met penetrated my labouring body with a sharp metal object without my knowledge or consent. I was sexually assaulted while giving birth.

After only just managing to not kick the woman who assaulted me, I ran into the nearest corner of the room, naked, and got on my hands and knees, faced the wall and closed my eyes to labour, praying they would go away. My private midwife arrived shortly thereafter.

Her job became keeping everyone away from me so that I could birth. Which I did, unassisted, not long after.

This is but one violation I experienced during my care and birth at the [REDACTED] Hospital. I was treated like a piece of meat. I was disbelieved. I was raped. And there was no cause for any of it. The maternity ward is not a safe place, even for women in perfect health presenting with a textbook labour.

After the birth, many of the ward staff asked me what classes I had done or what method I used to birth my baby without intervention. I was confused by the commotion. My private midwife later commented that it was because they had likely never witnessed a natural birth before. Can you imagine, a maternity ward that never sees the unfolding of normal physiologic birth. Clearly something is very wrong in a medical system that has strayed so far from helping women, that it now hinders them from having the opportunity to birth safely and with care and dignity.