

Submission
No 475

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I live in the [REDACTED] area. I gave birth to my two daughters who are now three and two years old in [REDACTED] Public Hospital. I intend to give birth to my third child at the same hospital in a few months due to the only other birth option for me is to 'free birth' at home seeing as hiring a private midwife for home birth is way beyond my financial circumstances.

I am taking the time to make this submission as I am certain there is a high prevalence of birth trauma in our community. This certainty comes from my own pregnancy and birthing experiences in which I was unable to have the model of care best suited to me, felt unsupported throughout my pregnancies, I felt pressured into receiving unwanted intervention during labor and, had to travel a far distance to an institution to give birth in an environment deemed 'safe' for birth.

I have included a summary of the subjective trauma events of my pregnancy and birth

- Unsuccessful multiple applications to MGP due to limited spots available
- Difficulty accessing test results such as ultrasounds and pathology through GP shared care. I often received messages from reception staff saying I had 'urgent' results but when I tried to book an appointment to see my GP the wait was weeks. I was refused copies of results as that may have led to misinterpretation. This caused undue stress.
- Out of pocket costs of GP visits.
- I have to travel 30km to the hospital. My first labour this was through heavy traffic. We are encouraged to stay at home until in established labor. I did this. I was unable to wear a seatbelt during travel as I was contracting so uncomfortably. If I was to leave earlier I would risk adrenaline taking me out of labor and risk being turned away when arriving at the hospital.
- I called ahead that I was coming to the hospital. Despite this, on arrival to birthing suite there was no available beds. I was in labor in a waiting room full of strangers. On multiple occasions my partner approached the midwives that we needed a private space to be met with comments like 'we are waiting for a cleaner' and 'unless theres a baby coming out you will have to wait'.
- I had made an informed decision to not have VE's during my birth which I voiced. But when I eventually got a room I was pressured to having a VE by the student midwife. I felt if I declined I was at risk of losing the room. This is a broken system, there should be enough space for women in labor without having to have fingers stuck inside them to prove they are in labor! I was 6cm so I passed, I was allowed to stay- hooray.
- When my body told me it was time to push the student midwife did another VE. Did she ask and did I say yes? Yes. Is this a valid consent? I believe not. I'm in a vulnerable state. Being made to feel like I need to have one when there is no threat. When I voiced earlier when I was more lucid it was against my wishes. My birth was progressing perfectly- my body told me it was time to push. She found a cervical lip during her VE. She said I wasn't allowed to push. She said that I wasn't to push for one hour and instilled fear of what might happen if I did push. A time limit was put on it, 'the senior midwife will come in at 2000hrs'. What the fuck. What kind of all knowing person knows, from her nursing station, that my cervical lip will be cleared at 2000hrs. Despite screaming for her to come and my support person asking for her multiple times, sure enough she came at 2000hrs. When she performed another VE. I was immediately 'allowed' to push. Not pushing took all my strength and caused me physical pain. Not being allowed to push, being told to ignore my body, disempowered me and made me question my ability to listen to my body. I was afraid to push in that birth and the next.
- I said I didn't want to have the oxytocin injection to birth the placenta. I had a normal physiological birth. I didn't need it. I was pressured into having it as the midwife swung from my placenta cord causing extreme discomfort and strongly suggesting it. I just wanted her to leave me alone. So I had it.
- Arriving just in time to the hospital for my second birth I was determined to listen to my body when it told me to push! I was resentful toward the midwife who told me it was time to push and threatened if I didn't she would have to call the doctor in. I knew my reluctance to push was birth trauma resurfacing from my previous birth. I wanted to tune in to my own body and make sure I was ready. But threats didn't allow for that. Furthermore, why is the doctor being used as a threat? Where was my support and reassurance.

- A fundal massage was performed by an unpleasant midwife post my second birth. Causing extreme pain. I told her to stop. To which she laughed and said 'If you think that hurt just wait, Im about to do it much harder than that'. She attempted to continue but, much to her surprise, I physically pushed her away!

I am aware that my 'trauma' is minimal in comparison to many others. Which is why my certainty is not based purely on my own experiences. Listening to the stories of other mothers has enlightened me to the fact that birth trauma is embedded in the birthing culture of our community! Seemingly nobody is having normal, physiological births. Women are inappropriately placed in the hands of the medical system for antenatal care and birthing which creates an environment spring loaded for unneeded intervention.

Birth is normal. Birth should be treated as normal. Birth trauma is preventable.

Birth should be funded by the health system to support and empower women to birth the way they choose to. Introducing localised birthing centres, community based on-call midwives, government funded home births are just some of the ways birth trauma can be prevented.

Please note I think midwives are amazing but are practicing under absurd guidelines and policies. I think the system in NSW which pregnant and birthing women are cared for is fucked. It needs to change.