

Submission
No 550

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My eldest daughter was born in [REDACTED] hospital on the 30th of April 2020. I struggled through an extremely rough pregnancy with Hyperemesis Gravidarum (unfortunately at no point receiving any level of support from the midwives or OB I was under, I had to seek out a knowledgeable gp to support me). Being my first child I didn't know any better than to just trust the system. My labour should have been fairly straightforward, and yet I became one of the statistics when they decided to artificially rupture my waters to move things along faster, with one intervention leading to another in a cascade of interventions.

The hospital was extremely busy that night and they just wanted to move us all through as quickly as possible to get into the next person. At no point was I given any information required for informed consent. I told the midwife that anti nausea meds (maxalon) was not going to work and she still went ahead and placed the iv without listening to me or giving me the option of saying no. When they placed a monitor on my daughters head during labour it was "we're just going to do this". Had they explained it was a literal screw going into her scalp I never would have consented; it's still a massive regret that I allowed that to happen to her but I genuinely didn't know any better at the time.

There was no discussion of the risks involved in any intervention they proposed, it was just "this is what we're doing now". And to top it off, I only found out after my daughter was born and I was receiving stitches that the OB had performed an episiotomy on me without my knowledge or consent. This led to an extremely long and painful recovery including pain from the incision site for nearly 12 months later, along with feeling violated. After the birth the staff were so rushed they tried to immediately move me out of the birthing suite down the other end of the labour ward to recovery, before I'd even had a chance to shower and wash the blood that coated me off, or complete golden hour with our newborn baby.

Both my husband and I walked away from the experience asking what the hell just happened and it's taken a lot of processing and discussion work in therapy to process our experience and move beyond it.

By contrast my second daughter was born on the 22nd of May 2022 in a beautiful, peaceful homebirth where my autonomy and rights were respected. I had a private midwife support me through the entire journey and she attended our birth. It was intervention free, natural as uncomplicated birth should be, and my recovery was soo much smoother and faster than after my first.

Why were my two experiences so different?

1. Continuity of care. This is such a simple thing that makes a huge difference to pregnant and birthing women. At the hospital I saw someone different each tome, I was little more than a number to them and the next patient to get through. My private midwife journey with me

and knew me personally. I trusted her to support me at a time I was most vulnerable and she knew my history and desires for this birth. Continuity of care is game changing.

2. Informed consent. In my first instance the hospital had its procedures and protocols and I simply had to comply with whatever they said. It would have “wasted” their time to inform me and gain my consent when they already “knew best”. My private midwife took the time to explain all the different options and procedures and respected my decisions.

Can we take a page from the Dutch, recognise that birth is a natural biological process and the majority of women will have a better birth experience if allowed to birth in a safe, calm environment of their own home away from unnecessary medical interventions. Making homebirth more accessible, affordable, and normalised (such as the homebirth part of the birthing wing at ██████████) would reduce birth trauma, increase positive outcomes for mother and baby, and reduce load on an already stretched thin/understaffed hospital system so they are better able to support those who actually need to be there and are experiencing high risk pregnancy/birthing complications. And we NEED continuity of care.