

Submission
No 553

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Writing my story is extremely hard, it's hard to relive this experience but my story needs to be heard and things in the maternity care system need to change ! I had a 36 hour labour, failed forceps which resulted in an emergency c-section and was very shocked and upset about the care I was given while in birthing suite and maternity ward at hospital. There are multiple events that happened while I stayed on the maternity ward in January 2021 that deeply traumatised me. During my pregnancy with MGP program (midwifery group practice) I was told NOT to make a birth plan as it would never go to plan. In hindsight this is them trying to control my birth and make me compliant to their request already in pregnancy. I remember disclosing to my care provider my worries about breastfeeding and

Birth only to be told it's fine, it will just happen.

I received no compassion or reassurance during my labour I was made to feel like an inconvenience for being in labour, my midwife complained that it was her 3rd night shift in a row. The midwife made rude comments while I was in labour about my age and relationships with my partner while in back to back contractions with a posterior baby. At this point I had been in labour 12 hours already and start to say "can't do this" and crying I was scared and needed reassurance. The midwife said to me " you are 22 years olds if you can go out and drink all night then get up and go to work the next morning you can have this baby". This midwife knew nothing about me. I was actually a nurse at this very hospital and had been for about 3-4 years but she judged me because of my age.

The midwife ignored my requested for pain relief - I want to sit in the bath or shower but I was told no with no reason as to why. This midwife ignored my concerns when my water changed colour and I wasn't feeling well. The midwife made sighing and puffing noises while sitting at the desk because I was "being too noisy during labour". This women made me feel extremely uncomfortable and unsafe and that I had no rights. She made me feel that I had no ability to birth my baby. I had given up. The midwife and doctors told me what was going to happen, they never ask for my permission or educate me on procedures they did. This includes vaginal exams, breaking my waters on a posterior baby (which I now know it not recommended) giving me antibiotics, telling I was having an epidural and many more things.

I was told I have to have an epidural and Pitocin when I did not want this. The epidural did not work and I was left in pain for hours in a bed with no support, reassurance or help. The midwife told me to start pushing when when the doctor left my room after they told me not to start pushing yet. My epidural had worn off and I was begging the staff to change positions in the bed as I was pushing. They refused and told me I wasn't allowed out of the bed. I had a room full of people sticking their hand inside me without my consent, they tried to apply a vacuum to my baby without my permission and I cried please stop. While I had 7-10 people ignoring me screaming in pain touching my vaginal I had a doctor lean over and telling me to sign a form. I was trying to read the form that was put in my face, all I could see was c-section I cried and begged them not to take me for a c-section, the doctors was standing there ignoring my concerns and talking about the risks of having a c-section. After I repeatedly told them no! A different doctor who was around my vaginal said "oh no we are just taking you for a forceps delivery your not going to have a c-section "

but you need to sign the form for us to take you.” They told me my baby was sick and need to be born. I signed the form.... I was 10cm and pushing for 5 hours until they took me for a emergency c- section/ failed forceps delivery.

5 hours being made to stay in bed on my back without pain relief while people had their hands inside me. Once in theatres I was separated from my partner. This was extremely distressing for me and him at this point.

After they gave me a spinal block it started to feel hard to breathe, I told the anaesthetic doctor next to me but he ignored me. I keep trying to breathe but it become harder and harder to breathe I wasn't able to move my arms and I just couldn't anymore and closed my eyes and stopped trying. They rushed to apply and oxygen mask and other things I don't remember. I remember looking at my partner with his head and his hand crying thinking we (our baby and I were going to die.) The team spend a long time trying to turn my baby with forceps but this did not work. I could hear the consultant yell at the junior that he had let go of my baby and “fucked up the procedure”. They then told me I have to have an emergency c-section. I was devastated I had gone with hell only for them to push my baby back up inside me and cut me open.

I get like a slab of meat on their table, no one cared about how I felt. It was just another day to them. While I was giving birth to my baby via c-section the staff started talking about what they were going to have for lunch... while I'm giving birth.. one of the biggest days of my life.

They let me hold my baby for a few minutes, did not take photos of us or him and took him away from me with my partner. While they were trying to finish the procedure the spinal block worn off and I could feel the operation happening to me. It was hard to get someone attention to tell them this but they eventually listened and help give me pain relief, but this just added to the traumatic event. I could feel what they were doing to me..

I was separated from my baby for 3 hours. When they gave me my baby, I really didn't felt anything, I felt numb, I didn't know how to feel.

My baby had drips in him and I never seen a doctor that told me why he was in special care in the first place and what they were doing to him. My stay on the maternity ward was a very disempowering and traumatic experience, some things that happen while on the Maternity ward was my pad was checked on arrived to the ward from theatre and was not checked was not checked again until 5am the next morning. This was about 18 hours that no one check to see if I was bleeding, also was not and not offered to be repositioned by the midwives on the ward until I got up more then 24hours post operative. I was extremely uncomfortable and I felt like the midwives didn't even think to offer to reposition me and I had been on my back since I had had an epidural the following day. I physically could not move myself not even sit up. Having a posterior labour and laying on my back for a very long time lead to extreme

discomfort and emotional distress for me. I had to wait for long periods of time for a nurse to help me with personal care. When I was still bed bound the day after my baby was born I went to Special care at 8am to feed my baby, I was told that the midwives were upset I was still at special care nursery at 10am I need to go back at 1030 for doctors review me, shower and have a catheter removal. Doctors seen me around 11:30, midwife keep telling me she would get me up for a shower soon, I told the midwife I need to feed bub at 12-12:30 in SCN. Buzzed to go to SCN for feed buzzer not answered. On phone to husband who was with our baby, I was very upset and distressed, bubs was crying for a feed. As I had not been out of bed yet and my baby was hungry and no midwife was answering my buzzer I had to allow them to given him formula.

This was very distressing for me and not supportive of my choice to breastfeed. The Midwife came and told me I would get out of bed soon and have a shower and have my catheter removed. I was getting very anxious at this point as I had not been moved of my back since having an epidural during labour and just need to stand up or even just sit up properly. When my partner came to see me I was still in bed at 2:30pm. I was sobbing from the pain and discomfort, I felt abandoned and unsupported by the midwives, I didn't feel as if I was asking for much. The midwife finally let me out of bed for a shower just before 3pm. The midwife didn't ask me what was wrong or why I was upset. I could have gone and feed my baby in SCN and been back to have a shower at the time they eventually allowed me to get out of bed.

The first day up on my feet I was not able to walk far and I need to be take to SCN in a wheelchair. I phoned SCN and asked when the next feed was and they said to pop over in an hour to 30 mins, I called for my midwife and ask her to go over SCN. Over an hour later I was still waiting to be take to my baby. SCN called me to say my son was very distressed and need a feed, and I cried to the nurse that I was still waiting to be taken over. More time went by and another call from SCN and I was still waiting. I had buzzed again but it had not been answered. The SCN nurse actually come to get me as I was just in to much pain to get there myself. I am very disappointed that it took so long for me to get to SCN to feed my baby when I was in a very vulnerable spot. when I couldn't get there myself. Being separated from your newborn is hard enough then not being able to physically get to them when they need you is even more distressing.

While I was staying on the maternity ward, it seemed that staff where not informed about my case. I had countless occasions when Staff where not aware of my birth situation. For example I asked for a frozen nappy and the midwife rude told I didn't need it as I had had a c-section. I then had to explained yes but I have had a failed forceps delivery to had a lot of pain swelling and discomfort in my vaginal as well. When I ask for pain relief I would be told what for ? Panadol and ibuprofen is all I need for a forceps delivery. I would then have to explain that not I had had a c-section. I felt that these midwives were quick to snap at me and not approachable. They treated me as if I was just winging for nothing, they made me feel like I could not ask for help. This lead to me being in pain for longer periods of time because I felt that I just had to suck it up. I was in a position where I was very vulnerable and still in shock from what had happened and really need support as I couldn't have support from friends and family due to COVID restrictions. No one from doctors to nurses came to talk to me about

after care with my c-section. No one told me not to lift anything heavy, no one gave me any tips or tricks to help with sitting to standing or how to reduce pressure or pain in my scar. I didn't even get an information sheet about how to care for myself after my c-section.

Inconsistent information given by different midwives about breastfeeding. When my baby joined me on the ward I expressed to the midwives I was struggling with breastfeeding due to the pain from my c-section and my son just wouldn't latch for 30-40 mins then fall asleep straight away. I was constantly told of 'it's fine' 'don't worry about it' yet I had damaged nipples. On the last day I was on the ward I was unsure about going home as I was still in pain and had only had my son back with me from SCN for 12-14 hours. There was an incident that occurred with a midwife that has impacted my mental health significantly and it has deeply traumatised me to the point I wasn't able to speak about it for months I didn't even share this information with my partner, my son's father for about 4 months after the birth.

My son was crying and I had been having trouble getting him to latch to the breast and I was crying as I could hold him, I was in a lot of pain in my back shoulders and scar and the midwife walked in and told me to try side lying feeding and walked away. I tried to give this ago but was still struggling and became flustered and upset. The midwife walked back in talking to another midwife and seen me struggling, the AM midwife walked over and grabbed my baby head to squish his head into my breast while turning around and talking to the other midwife. My baby was screaming and I just went into shock and didn't know what to do. This went on for a minute or 2 then the midwife let go of my son's head and said 'oh we can try again later'. I just laid there alone and cried. In that moment I decided I need to get the hell out of here with my baby. My partner arrived not long after to find me a mess crying and unable to talk to him about what happened. All I could say was we needed to go home.

This experience here has given me postnatal depression and anxiety and severe PTSD including months of flashbacks and reliving parts of birth over and over. This made my start to mothering very difficult and made it difficult to function as a person in general.

The birth culture in Australia needs to change, I would never want another woman to go through what I have. I believe that care providers need to be held legally responsible for abusing women and criminally charged. Women have the right to say no without you pushing your own agenda. Often information given in hospital is not evidence based or best practices and women do their own research but are bullied by care providers to follow their hospital's "rules". Care providers should treat women as individuals! We do not all fit the same policy or timeline during birth. Midwives are meant to advocate for women but instead they are worried about losing their job due to policies and procedures that are outdated. This needs to change! I believe there needs to be a royal commission into maternity care to help stop abuse happening to women.

I also believe women should have free access to any care provider they wish to have. This includes private practicing midwives providing homebirth in the community. The gold

standard of care cost \$6500 and more for some women. With my second pregnancy, I contacted a private practicing midwife for my care. I only had a short time with them due to losing the pregnancy but this type of care I received was truly amazing! I felt so held and supported and that the care was tailored to my needs. I also think there needs to be more mental health support for women and their families who experience traumatic births in the public health care system. I hope you invite leading midwives and health care professionals to help write your recommendation as these are the people who know how to help the system and see the women who are left traumatised by this system. Thank you for reading my story and I really hope you make serious changes to the maternity care system, women do not need to be traumatised like this.