

Submission
No 557

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I wish to submit a statement with regards to the care received on 12 July 2016 upon admission to [REDACTED] hospital for the birth of my daughter.

I arrived at the hospital in the early hours of the morning following a light appearance of meconium during stage two of labour. Prior to this, I had laboured comfortably at home in the presence of private midwives who monitored my progress closely using several methods including both internal examination and foetal monitoring with the Doppler. Foetal monitoring showed no signs of distress prior to transfer, nor, to my knowledge, at any point after.

Upon arrival at the hospital I was seen by a number of hospital staff. I was given an incredibly rough and painful internal examination by a midwife, which left me feeling physically violated and upset. The Obstetrician then requested to do another internal exam within minutes. Despite my clear objection to this, he continued to repeat the request several more times and I continued with a clear 'no'. It would not be an exaggeration to describe this as badgering. It was at this point that my private midwife calmly but firmly interjected to confirm that I had already said no.

During this time I was experiencing regular and strong contractions. Given that this was the delivery unit of a busy hospital, I would expect the staff to be experienced in and aware of, a women's inability to engage in discussion in the midst of such a contraction. Despite this, a midwife or nurse was repeatedly talking at me and trying to take a blood sample. Given my repeated requests to the staff to wait until in-between contractions to engage with me, the nurse persisted, even though the hospital's now constant monitoring showed no signs of foetal distress. At this time my private midwife politely suggested she wait until the contraction was finished and I was able to consent to the procedure.

The treatment I received by several staff in [REDACTED] hospital has left me feeling traumatised. The obstetrician was completely unsympathetic and bordering on aggressive. He was disrespectful to me as both a human and a patient. The treatment and behaviour by a number of the other staff was of no higher standard. The two private midwives in the room were at all times respectful, calm and measured in their conduct and communication. My partner will also attest to this. Furthermore, when it was requested that my private midwife attend theatre with me, it was declined on the basis of hospital policy. I did not feel comfortable in the Doctor's care and went into theatre feeling mistreated, frightened and vulnerable.

In terms of the plan for a homebirth VBAC, this was not a decision taken lightly by any of the parties involved. It is based on research, case studies and experience. With regards to 'standard, safe and modern' obstetric practice, it is fact that Australia's rate of caesarean births are well in excess of that recommended by the World Health Organisation and just because it has, in 'modern' times become standard does not mean it should be or that it is always 'safe'.

Vaginal Birth After Caesarean (VBAC) risks have been well studied and documented and two private midwives had discussed the risks and their likelihood with me on several occasions. I was also given relevant books to read by both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and I also sourced my own reading material, including articles from several medical journals. This was an informed choice by every measure.

The topic of a homebirth Vaginal Birth After Caesarean was raised at the 17-week visit with the [REDACTED] staff member with whom I met. I advised the midwife at this visit that I was considering a homebirth Vaginal Birth After Caesarean and she clearly stated that that was not possible. I countered that indeed it was and that there had been many successful such deliveries, but feeling that she was not receptive, I did not pursue the conversation any further. I was, at that stage, still amassing and working through the reading material myself.

Additionally, I was contacted by the hospital several days after discharge and the caller advised that I should have let the hospital know of my pregnancy and due date in case of the need for admission at any point. We had booked in with the hospital in late 2015 and as per above, I had even had an appointment with hospital staff and was given a yellow patient card. The fact that there was no record of booking for the birth is an oversight by the hospital rather than an omission of doing so.

In summary, [REDACTED] Hospital's role in the delivery of my daughter was far from positive. Rather than demonstrating a model of patient care involving kindness, respect and empathy, it has demonstrated a model of rudeness and aggression, completely lacking in compassion. It has left me traumatised and fearful with a long process of healing ahead.