

Submission
No 590

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had my first baby in 2021. What was previously an exciting time for us, quickly diminished with our first obstetric appointment at ██████████ Hospital. They separated myself from my partner and surprised me with incredibly personal questions regarding DV and sexual assault. Having experienced both of these issues in a previous relationship, I immediately burst into tears having to declare events I have been growing from for decades. When asked why they needed to ask such questions, the nurse shrugged saying it would flag mothers that were at risk of hurting their babies. I cannot begin to describe how deeply offensive and hurtful that moment was for me. As a health worker myself, I can understand that these questions could lead to some form of support for the mother, but nothing was offered whatsoever in my case. In my final trimester, I was forced to book an induction due to 'admin issues' with the Dr stating that if I wanted to risk my baby's life and birth naturally when the hospital might not have any room, then it was my choice. I became increasingly anxious regarding induction, particularly concerning the use of the Foley catheter. The OBGYN became annoyed and asked why I was asking questions about how he wants to do my job. I had to explain that due to a past sexual assault, the idea of forcing my body to open when it wasn't ready was extremely distressing. He completely discarded this and told me there was no way around procedure and that I just needed to focus on the baby and not their hospital policies.

Finally, when I was induced, I informed them I was already experiencing natural early labour. The midwife stated that there was no doctor available to reassess and I should just go with the induction. Labour came suddenly and violently with no available room or bed to birth. My partner who was equally as terrified, put me on a soiled bed and pushed me into a space that was more private than the hallway that they had left us. Thankfully, by the time I was beginning to push, they were able to find a room and a bed (even though they were still actively cleaning someone else's blood from the floor as I began to push). I sustained a 2nd degree tear post birth. It took 90mins for a Dr to come in to begin repairing the tear. I begged her not to put my legs in the stirrups (as forcing my legs to be held apart was far too similar to my assault as a teenager). She refused and pushed my legs into the stirrups. I began to cry and the midwife came over to my face and told me to just look at my baby to forget what the Dr was doing. The pain from the injections was excruciating after the wound had 90 mins to swell and inflame and I was growing increasingly distressed, crying and begging her to stop. Without warning, the midwife pressed the gas mask to my face and held my head down. I lost it at that point.

My rape involved someone holding my legs apart and another man holding me down by my throat and here I was, being disoriented by a gas and feeling like I was right there again whilst being stitched back together. My partner watched and cried himself as he watched on. We left that hospital so traumatized by the experience. I cried every day quietly in the shower reliving them holding me down, every day for about 8 months. I sought help from my GP and counsellors whilst trying to navigate parenthood for the first time. I had to endure anxiety attacks and emotional breakdowns 12 months later when I returned to work and had to engage professionally with the hospital again. I almost quit my career as an Intensive Care Specialist because the memories as a patient in my own hospital were so traumatizing. Without the love and support of my family, I wouldn't be persevering today. But my faith in the current health system has been broken and is beyond repair.