

Submission
No 592

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I suffer severe SPD during pregnancy. This means my pelvis is out of alignment and it is incredibly painful. I have had this with all my 3 pregnancies, in only one pregnancy with this an issue and it was when I birthed in hospital.

I had my first baby in hospital through the antenatal clinic. My baby was healthy, all was going well apart from the fact I struggled to walk. I was on crutches due to the pain. I was pressured into an induction due to my baby's head "measuring big" and that meant I "may never walk again". I was offered an induction at 37w and I refused, I was offered an induction at 38w and I refused and at 39w I was in so much pain and was told "we won't let you go past 40w or you may never walk again". Well of course that was horrifying and I thought I wasn't going to have a choice anyway so I may as well just do it.

The induction procedure was the most traumatic thing I have ever experienced. Due to my SPD I had to be held down on the bed while doctors examined my cervix. I wasn't given a choice. I had tears rolling down my face, I felt like I was being assaulted. The pain was excruciating but I was told it had to be done. I had the tape, it didn't work. I then had the balloon catheter which which so extremely painful due to my pubic joint being inflamed and out of alignment. I was shaking and throwing up from the pain. I needed gas and air for them to even insert it. But was told it had to be done. Eventually someone came and let some of the water out of it so the pain was more manageable. The balloon didn't work so they put prostaglandin gel. I was given a fact sheet about induction but that did not explain the side effects or risks of anything, nor was it ever explained to me. Next I was told they would be breaking my waters at 6am.

At 4:30am I started having contractions. I was so confused because they were so close together, they were very strong. The Dr turned up at 6am and broke my waters - if they had bothered to examine me I was very much in established labour and did not need my waters broken. They scratched my babies head as he was so close to being born. I was then yelled at by a nurse as I couldn't walk to delivery, I also couldn't sit in a wheelchair (my baby was very very close to being born). But because I hadn't been in labour long they thought I was over reacting.

Throughout the 3 day induction process I was constantly told my plan of a natural birth **would not** happen and I would **need** an epidural. How horrible for every healthcare provider there to be so dismissive of my plans and my needs.

I got to delivery at about 7:30am and my son was born at 7:51, naturally, the midwife in delivery was absolutely lovely and seemed to look at me as a person rather than just procedure or protocol. It didn't matter I had only been in labour for 3 hours, she could tell my baby was coming. I am not sure why the doctor who broke my waters unnecessarily couldn't see the same thing, or they just didn't care.

I luckily got to have delayed cord clamping and put baby to breast in delivery, it hurt so badly. When I look back at the video he was sucking his lips in, he was not latching properly at all and the midwife is heard telling me he is doing great. He was not.

I was also told I had to have stitches for some grazing - only 2. I couldn't open my legs so was told I had to have an epidural post birth. This would have been cosmetic and I have absolutely no idea why I wasn't told that it was optional. I still have back pain 6 years later due to the epidural.

The postpartum care was absolutely disgusting. My baby had a scratch on his head (he is 6 and has a scar from it), he was struggling to breastfeed which I was determined to do. I had horrible midwife after horrible midwife come and milk me for colostrum. They wouldn't let us keep it or feed it to my baby, we had to ask for them to bring me syringes and cups, they were too busy to help or show us how to feed him.

I had private health insurance which meant I was entitled to a private room, this was so my husband could stay with me as I still couldn't walk, I couldn't pick up my son as I couldn't get to the bassinet. We were told we didn't have private insurance so I was put in a joint room. It turns out they were reading my baby's paperwork and since he was just born he wasn't on the insurance. When my husband asked again for them to check the paperwork he said "well if you don't ask you don't get" and was told "No here, if you do ask you don't get so you are lucky". I couldn't believe the rudeness from these people.

I waited 2/3 days (I cant remember exactly) to see a lactation consultant. The only help I had in the meantime was midwives grabbing my sons head and violently shoving him into my breast. By the time she got to me I was bleeding from the nipples and had blisters. My husband was having to milk me as it was too painful for me to do myself. When the lactation consultant saw me she told me he was latching fine, I probably didn't have enough milk and needed to buy formula on the way home. My breasts were swollen and engorged and I definitely had milk. She asked how much my breasts had grown during pregnancy and said since it wasn't much I probably didn't have milk. I was not wearing a bra but had infact gone up multiple sizes as soon as my milk came in, just not during pregnancy. I now know that breast size during pregnancy has no baring on your ability to produce milk. As soon as she told me to buy formula I discharged myself as I could see I was getting no help.

I ended up seeing the local breastfeeding clinic twice a week to try and get help. I burst into tears when I saw the hospital lactation consultant there. I knew she wouldn't help me. The advice I got was my baby was feeding too much, not enough, he was gaining too much, he was gaining not enough, my breast hurting was completely normal, me crying every feed was normal and I needed to express and suck it up or use formula.

Eventually I saw a private IBCLC who diagnosed my son with a tongue tie. I had it snipped and breastfed him without a drop of formula until he was 4. No thanks to any help from any of the maternity services publicly available to me. Even if they didn't know about ties I shouldn't have been brushed off and someone should have been able to advise me where to get further help.

My 2nd baby was a covid baby. We wanted a home birth as I was far too traumatised by my hospital experience to go there again but at \$6,000 we couldn't justify the cost when hospital is free. By 20w restrictions were coming in, my SPD had flared up and I was already being spoken to about inductions. I couldn't get to my appointments because I had no one to watch my son. I was in tears anytime I thought about birth. My husband and I decided for my mental health the cost of a home birth was worth it. We found an amazing private midwife, she did not pressure me one bit, was completely supportive and made me feel comfortable and excited about the birth. My husband was very anxious about a home birth. My daughter's birth took 6 hours and I had her in a birth pool in my house. I was in bed with my son and daughter that night. My midwife visited me at home post birth, I felt extremely supported and calm and my daughter's birth was very healing.

I then had my 3rd child at home while again suffering with severe SPD, it was a harder birth. It was not even a question if we would go to hospital. I did have to book into hospital however and as I had tested GBS positive early in pregnancy (and subsequently tested negative) I had an OB from the hospital call me and ask if I knew the risks I was taking by having a home birth. I felt like I was being judged because my informed choice was not the choice he would suggest. It did not make me feel safe had I needed to present to hospital. I knew he would have bullied me into having antibiotics. When my son was born he had the cord wrapped around his body and his neck twice. If I were in hospital I would have almost certainly have been forced to have a c section. My son did not need any kind of help after he was born, we were in a safe space to allow my body to do what it needed to.

From my story you can see the difference in having choices and being listened to by a trusted care provider. The birth of my first child still breaks my heart. I can still remember being held down on the bed while procedures were forced on me. That is not ok. No woman should ever have to experience that.