

Submission
No 597

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a 34 year old mother of two, born in New Zealand and grew up in Perth. I had my first baby in Adelaide where my husband and I were living at the time. My first son, born in 2019 is almost four. We now live in [REDACTED] Sydney and have welcomed our second son in May 2023. He is now 3 months old.

Once we found out I was pregnant with my second son, we went to the GP to be referred into the local hospital for prenatal care. We were living in [REDACTED] and the nearest hospital was [REDACTED]. I was told the hospital would ring me, but they didn't and so I called a few weeks later to book in. I asked to be put on the waitlist for the midwifery group practice as I knew spots were limited and you had to be early. Continuity of care was important to me as I know there is evidence of greater birth outcomes with less intervention. I was told I needed to wait to meet a midwife to be assessed first and needed to send all my paperwork through. In the meantime, we were given notice to vacate our [REDACTED] rental as the owners were selling (Sydney rental market is in its own crisis). We moved 5km to [REDACTED]. Evidently, and unknown to me, this was now out of the catchment zone for [REDACTED]-one street to be precise. I was told this when I rung to confirm my appointment. The clerk mentioned I could birth at [REDACTED] but I would not be eligible for any at home post natal care. After breastfeeding challenges with my first born, I knew I needed access to a midwife to visit my home after birth. I was also told, as [REDACTED] is a small hospital, if anything was to happen to me or the baby, I'd be transferred to [REDACTED], which was too far from my home. So I decided I'd better go to [REDACTED] which wasn't at all local or familiar to me.

After this, I needed to go back to the GP to get a new referral for [REDACTED] (I phoned and they would not accept the [REDACTED] referral). By this time I was 9 or 10 weeks and at my 12 month booking in appointment I was told the MGP was full. The midwife also assessed me as ineligible for midwifery care and I was denied access to continuity of care with a midwife as I have Hashimoto's Thyroiditis (already managed by a private Endocrinologist and monitored by my GP) and a congenital heart condition (managed by a private Cardiologist and asymptomatic). This assessment resulted in me being placed under obstetric care at [REDACTED]

Eventually, after some negotiation with the Obstetrician at [REDACTED] it was agreed I could see a midwife for the remainder of my antenatal appointments. I hated going to the clinic. I felt like I went more frequently than I needed to, and every appointment was with a different doctor and we discussed the same things-the medical conditions were more important than my pregnancy, despite the cardiologist writing that my condition was low risk in pregnancy and a previous uncomplicated pregnancy. It was frustrating because I needed to take half a day off work for every appointment (fortnightly from 30 weeks)

Once I was 'allowed' in the midwife clinic, I was excited to discuss birth options and post natal care. I was surprised in my first midwife appointment as there was no mandatory urine test, nor did I have to be weighed. The midwife was not impressed that I was in her clinic and said that I shouldn't be there because of my medical conditions. I said that the OB referred me into the clinic at my request and she continued the appointment, but made me take the urine

test and get weighed. I felt completely discriminated against and really just wanted to be treated 'normally' like other women in the midwife clinic. I can understand some risk with my conditions, however they were being managed by specialists within their scope already and this was noted on my care plan by the OB

. A midwife was likely to deliver my baby, why couldn't I be in a midwife clinic to help me prepare for that? It turns out that midwife referred me back in to the OB clinic without telling me, so when I went to book the next appointment the clerk had no choice but to book with the OB. Next appointment was a waste of time. At the OB clinic, we discussed the same medical conditions. I again asked to go back to the midwife. Next appointment with the midwife was positive, but again she referred me back to the OB and said that after discussing with her team leader that I was 'outside the scope of midwifery care' and couldn't be seen by them again. This left me feeling defeated and increasingly frustrated that I wasn't able to receive that gold standard of care in pregnancy, and would go into birth at [REDACTED] with a midwife on shift and not have that opportunity to ask questions of a midwife about birth, and hospital policy prior. I felt denied care, rejected and too high risk for a midwife to look after me. My confidence was declining. At the OB clinic, I felt like I was wasting my time (and theirs) and on the road to unnecessary intervention. I even had to pay for an additional growth scan as the OB told me my baby was measuring small, despite being in normal range. This cost me \$500 and came back normal.

After this, I prepared a birth plan and typed it out. After being rejected twice by the midwife, I was anxious that I would get to birth suite and they would see my conditions and treat me as high risk and that I wouldn't be able to birth the way I wanted as natural as possible without monitoring or intervention. The consultant came into that appointment for the first time and said everything in my plan was reasonable and they would advocate for the birth I have chosen. She was very reassuring and apologized for me being bounced around.

My prenatal care should have been better. I should have not been denied continuity of care. I shouldn't have been tossed around between hospitals, embroiled in paperwork that saw me miss out on the MGP and potentially denied postnatal care at home..i shouldn't have been bounced from clinic to clinic. This left me feeling anxious about going to the clinic, to the point where I didn't want to attend prenatal appointments. If it wasn't for my husband's support, I wouldn't have gone. I ended up going post dates, which worried me more about the cascade of intervention. I wasn't allowed to go past 41+3 because of the risk of still birth and this being hospital policy despite the monitoring coming back as normal.

I ended up birthing spontaneously at 41+1 in hospital with a beautiful midwife in a empowering, vaginal birth with no interventions or drugs. It's such a shame I felt so scared and anxious at the end of my pregnancy. It really was so unnecessary and leaves me sceptical of the pregnancy, birth "hospital mill". I wish I could have afforded or had access to private midwifery care and affordable home birth. Women shouldn't need to fight for themselves at every point of contact with the medical system. Birth is not a medical event. AA