

Submission
No 600

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a registered midwife working in a NSW public hospital and have been for the past 14 years. I have experience caring for women whose wishes are not honored when it comes to their birthing experience. During their antenatal care most women see midwives and are encouraged to think about, learn about, and plan for their birthing experience. Time and time again I see these women reach the birthing unit and have their wishes and preferences disregarded. It is not necessarily an intentional disregard of their wishes, it is more that "the doctor knows better" or the system knows better as the case may be. Women are not given access to evidence based information and are given information based on fear and the opinion of the medical staff.

I cared for a woman who had HELLP syndrome (a serious complication of pregnancy that has high risk for morbidity and mortality for the mother and baby). The woman was 32 weeks and very unwell. Her blood tests and her condition stabilized, and the medical team advised her it was time to have her baby before she deteriorated more. The doctor wanted her to consent to a caesarean section as she felt that was the safest way to deliver the baby. The woman did not give her consent to the procedure, but didn't feel she could tell the doctor, given the way the doctor had spoken to her as though she had no choice. I advocated for the woman's choice and had a conversation with the doctor and advised her the woman did not consent to a caesarean section. The doctor's response was that "well she has to. The baby needs to be born. What does she want then?" and I informed her the woman wanted to try for a vaginal birth by having an induction of labour. The doctor told me that she was not offering an induction. This doctor had completely removed any autonomy, agency, or decision making from this woman and her partner. I informed the doctor that it looks as though we are stuck at a stalemate then, because the woman does not consent to the operation, and you are saying she has to have her baby today due to her condition.

The doctor then went back into the room and repeated the same consult again (that the woman had already said no to). It was as though the doctor felt that if the woman didn't agree with her, then she must not understand. There was no consideration that she may simply have a different opinion or be considering different evidence.

I ended up calling a different consultant doctor, who agreed to support the woman's choice to have an induction of labour and she went on to birth her baby vaginally about 6 hours later and she and her baby were monitored and remained well.

The process of negotiation took around 6 hours, as long as it took the woman to birth her baby normally. I understand people need to make informed decisions, but the information needs to be balanced and accurate, and in our current maternity system it isn't.