

Submission  
No 611

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

In April 2011 I gave birth to a 4.579kg baby at [REDACTED] Hospital. I am a small-framed person with a pre-pregnancy weight of 49kg, so he was comparatively very large. My concerns throughout pregnancy over the size of my baby were dismissed. I was told "all first time mums worry about the size of the baby, you will be fine" despite the baby measuring 2-3weeks large for dates at each check up.

I requested an induction at 40 weeks and 41 weeks due to my concerns about size and due to the fact my grandfather was dying. I wanted him to see my baby before he passed. These requests were denied. I was not induced until 41 weeks, 6 days which also happened to be the day before the Easter long weekend when the hospital is very understaffed. My grandfather died before I was able to leave hospital.

Once in active labour, my request for an epidural was discouraged and then delayed for around 1.5hrs. I was in so much pain that I lost my vision. The epidural only worked on my left side, I had full feeling throughout the birth in my right side. As time wore on, it became apparent that my baby was in distress but also that he was stuck and it was too late for an emergency caesarean.

The decision was made without my consent to turn off my epidural so that I could "feel more and push harder". Then an episiotomy was performed with no pain relief. No one told me this was going to happen and no one explained what they were doing. It was just done and I felt everything. I also suffered what my private physio believed was a 3rd degree tear. My baby was then removed with forceps.

Due to his size, my baby suffered nerve damage and shoulder dystocia. He required support from a paediatric physiotherapist, osteopath, speech therapist and occupational therapist until he was in Year 1 at school in order to meet normal developmental milestones as a result. This came at a significant financial and time cost to our family.

The morning following the birth I realised I had no control over or movement in my right leg. The obstetrician on duty came in to check on me, bringing four student doctors with him. When I explained this, he grabbed my leg roughly and yanked it high into the air and began circling my leg in all directions. I have never been in so much pain in my life. I was screaming and begging him to stop and he would not. He proceeded to yank my leg around whilst explaining what he was doing to the students, over my screaming as if I was not there. He did not stop until a midwife came in to find out why I was screaming. At this point he put my leg down and told me I had a torn pubic symphysis ligament and would require 6 months of bed rest. If there was no improvement at that point I would need surgery. We did not receive further information/advice about my injury or prognosis until Day 3.

Two midwives from Thailand came to my room on Day 3 and said my injury was common in Thailand and is treated there by wrapping towels tightly around women's hips. This is what

they did. I had two hospital bath towels firmly tied around my hips. As third world as this remedy seems, it was the most comfort and stability anyone had offered me up to that point.

On Day 5 the Women's Health Physio saw me. She began by telling me she was extremely busy and could only spend 5 minutes with me. I explained my mobility issue. She said there was nothing she could do, aside from complete bed rest, I would just have to wait it out and come back in 6 months if I was still in a wheelchair. Then she left the room whilst I was sitting in the wheelchair crying.

I should add that the birth, (specifically the 3rd degree tear and episiotomy) also caused urinary and faecal incontinence. Neither of these issues were addressed in any way in the hospital, by the doctors, midwives or physio. I sought the help of a private women's health physio for support in my recovery.

I also suffered significant blood loss and could not stay awake or stand for more than 30-40 seconds without fainting, meaning I could not care for my baby. However the doctors would not give me a transfusion because it was the Easter long weekend. It was not until my uncle, who is a GP, saw me on Day 4 and realised how unwell I was, that he insisted the hospital staff give me a transfusion.

Throughout the five days I was at the hospital, I was repeatedly told by various doctors and midwives that I was young and should just be happy my baby was healthy and that I should go home, despite being unable to move independently. My husband or mother had to move my legs off the bed for me and get me into the wheelchair. Every movement was excruciating.

My pain medication was changed several times without my knowledge or consent. Whilst my initial pain medication was helping me and working well, at some point staff changed it on two separate occasions to another medication that caused me to hallucinate. They refused to change back to the initial medication until my uncle, who is a GP, intervened on my behalf.

Once home, my sister found a private women's health physio who helped me immensely. She had me out of the wheelchair and walking frame within two weeks. However I still required 12 months of physiotherapy and pilates to regain movement and strength. This was all paid for out of our own pocket, I was not eligible for any form of government financial assistance.

Due to my birth trauma, my milk did not come in until Day 7. We repeatedly expressed concern about this but were told every day that the baby would be fine, breast is best. I was being made to use the hospital breast pump every few hours despite how unwell I was. I was unable to get myself down the hall to visit the lactation consultant and therefore was not able to see her. On Day 4 we became more forceful in our concerns over our baby's wellbeing as he stopped producing urine and was no longer producing tears when he cried. We demanded

to be allowed to give him formula at this point. Some of the midwives were openly disapproving of this decision and kept telling us that breast is best.

I did lodge a complaint about my experience with the HCCC but this was a long and traumatic process in itself as I had to relieve all the trauma in detail. I also had to argue with the hospital as they were reluctant to release my records. When my records were finally handed over, several key pieces of information (size of my tear, amount of blood loss). My complaint did not result in any real changes being made at the hospital and I have since personally met two women, and know of a third who have suffered very similar birthing experiences there as I did before them.

Lastly during my third pregnancy, the disrespect with which birthing women can be treated in the hospital system was really highlighted to me. At a time when you are feeling at your most vulnerable both physically and emotionally, hospital staff can be nasty and dismissive. Upon admission for a planned caesarean, the staff were hostile and rude to me because my obstetrician had double booked me. This was done without my knowledge and totally out of my control. It was an administration issue between my obstetrician and the hospital – however the midwives spoke to me rudely and made it clear that it was a nuisance it was to have me turning up unannounced. After my third baby was born, I remember having a shower when the bathroom door was swung wide open and two midwives were standing in the doorway demanding I immediately take pain medication whilst they watched. I asked if I could just grab a towel to wrap around myself and they said no, they didn't have time to wait. They stood in the doorway and stared at me whilst I swallowed the tablets, naked, dripping wet and covered in soap suds. Then they left and left the door open behind them. It was an incredibly humiliating and embarrassing experience. Whilst they were so insistent that I take the medication, other midwives would forget or delay giving pain medication because they didn't feel it was necessary. I was sent home after my third baby with only Panadol and nurofen to manage the caesarean pain. On Day 10 when I went for my check up with my obstetrician I was in so much pain and discovered that the hospital should have sent me home with much stronger medication. My recovery and mobility were hindered by this error.

Please use this inquiry to make changes to the way birthing mothers are treated in the hospital system. To this day I cannot enter [REDACTED] Hospital without feeling anxious and light-headed because of my ordeal and I know that myself and my son were very lucky to have survived what happened to us. Please change things so that my daughter and my nieces never have to experience any of what I endured. Thank you for running this much needed inquiry.