

Submission
No 612

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My name is [REDACTED] and I live in [REDACTED] NSW. I have two children aged 5 and 2.5 years. My son was due early 2021 and COVID restrictions were in place, although I was able to have two people attend the birth. I had polyhydramnios and my son was measuring ahead in head circumference and weight. I was having additional scans as my daughter was IUGR. From 28 weeks the conversation around induction started due to his size. I had been induced with my daughter due to IUGR and low fluid so was very keen to try spontaneous labour. At 36 weeks I was told there may be challenges delivering vaginally due to his head circumference according. Induction was discussed and I felt it was likely my best option because I had an episiotomy with my daughter. I was tired, hot, feeling very heavy and exhausted in the latter stages of this pregnancy. I had also lost my dad just 8 weeks before.

I had gel applied at 2pm on the maternity ward while my husband was present and then left after dinner, told to come in the next morning when I would be moved to the birthing unit. Again, restrictions were in place so there were limits on the time people could spend on the maternity ward.

I was checked at 830pm and by 10pm messaged my husband and mum, who were my birth supports suggesting that they keep their phones close as I was experiencing contracts. I tried to sleep but was uncomfortable was told I would be check around 230. The contractions were painful and I started to walk around the double room to manage my pain, listening to music. I would rest in between contractions. At 230 I was checked and was 3cm dilated, At this point another woman was admitted into the other bed and I was mindful of her need to rest so stopped walking around the room. The contractions were painful and I would grip the bed and breathe in an effort to remain quiet. The midwife came in to do rounds and I explained I was uncomfortable with contractions and back pain. I explained I didn't have this with my daughter and felt the pain was more intense this time. She offered pain relief after speaking with the doctor, gave me a heat pack for my back and encouraged me to rest where I could.

From here it is hard to remember the exact time sequence of events. I felt nauseous and was offered a wafer, which I took before immediately vomiting. She told me she would check me at 6am and I may like to have a shower to manage my pain. It was 5/530am and I moved into the bathroom, texting a friend and saying I wasn't looking forward to the day because it was already more painful than my first labour. She rang me while I was in the bathroom and spoke to me on speaker phone while I was in the shower. After 10 minutes she told me I had 3 contractions during our conversation, lasting a minute each and I needed to get out of the shower and call the midwife. I tried a few times to get myself dressed and leave the bathroom but was uncomfortable and would get back in the shower for pain relief. I managed at one point to return to my bed and call the midwife.

When she arrived, I told her I was in pain and felt I was getting close to giving birth. She told me it was getting close to shift change and she would go and see if there was a space in the birth unit for me and she may be able to arrange the gas for me to use. Around 6am she came back and told me I could move to the birthing unit. I contacted my mum and husband to come to the hospital at this point and stood up to my waters breaking and the immediate sensation

that I needed to push. I had laboured all night without my support people, trying not to make too much noise to disturb my room mate and was terrified my mum and husband would miss the birth. I couldn't walk to the birth unit and was taken by wheelchair without my bags to the birth suite. I was anxious and did not want to birth without my husband at least but it was also important to me that I have my mum there, particularly as we wanted to share the experience after losing my dad.

There was nothing ready for me, it was changeover time but these midwives were incredible in keeping me calm and trying to keep me comfortable as I lay on the bed, desperately hoping I wouldn't give birth alone. Both my mum and husband arrived at the hospital (separately). My mum at 635 and my husband at 650. I immediately started pushing and it was found that my son's head was stuck on my episiotomy scar. I had not learnt about the importance of scar tissue massage. I had another episiotomy and he was born at 707am. My husband had only been in the room for 17 minutes and missed my entire labour. We were all in shock and instead of it being the calm, happy birth experience I hoped for, it was incredibly stressful and isolating. The midwives in the birth suite were lovely and so supportive. However I felt I had been left to labour alone all night with clear signs I was progressing. This was confirmed when a midwife brought my bags to the room at 830 from the ward. I still didn't even have my bag with the items I had prepared for labour until after my baby was born. She looked in surprise when she saw me holding my son but said "I didn't think you were very far off when you vomitted. I knew you were in transition then". I had no recollection seeing meeting her, confirmed by her comment that I was in transition.

At first we thought it was quite a funny birth story but it was only after a few days I realised the grief I had around that experience. I was left to labour alone in a shared room, trying to remain quiet to not disturb the other person who needed to rest and it took my friend on the phone to point out that I was in active labour. I was too embarrassed to say anything at the time and told everyone it was fine and made for a good story. In reality, it wasn't fine. My birth was stressful. I lay on the bed trying to keep my baby from coming out instead of listening to my body and doing what felt natural because I didn't want to do it alone, without his dad present. The lights were on, the blinds were open, it was bright and sterile. I asked the midwives to turn off the lights and they were more than happy too but my plan to have music playing, low lights and a warm space were taken from me because they failed to notice I was further along than I was and my concerns were disregarded as I was told to "hop in the shower".

I have only cried about this a few times as I tell myself "it wasn't that bad", "no one died", "you survived" etc but in reality, the health system let my family down. My son weighed 3595g when born and had a head circumference of 34cm. He was average sized but I was induced because he was going to be a "big" baby and it would be hard for me. I felt pressured and resigned to an induction and I hate how my birth turned out.