

Submission
No 620

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

This submission is extremely difficult for me to write, so please bear with me. My traumatic birth experience started during the early stage of going in to labour. At the time, I didn't know this would be the case.

I knew early in the day I had started going in to labour, as my contractions were more frequent than the braxton hicks contractions I had been experiencing during the third trimester. I had slept majority of the day and pain continued to worsen. My midwife had just got back from leave (she was away majority of my pregnancy) and our appointment that day had been cancelled. I called her for advice on what to do as nothing was helping the pain. I told her everything that I had tried to help with my pain. "Just have a sleep" she said after saying it sounded like I had started going in to labour. I ended up calling her back 10 minutes later as I was feeling worse. I ended up deciding to go and get checked out at the hospital.

When my partner and I arrived, I checked in with the QR code at 9:48pm. We were greeted by a nurse who took us straight to the maternity ward. This is where our world completely changed in a matter of minutes. We got in to a room and the midwife was going through a checklist of questions. I stated that my pain level was sitting at an 8 or 9 out of 10. Because I wasn't screaming in pain at that point, the midwife questioned me saying "oh, are you sure?" She then proceeded to check for my daughters heartbeat. It was taking some time and she said "oh I can't find the heartbeat." And continued trying to find it in different spots. Naturally my partner and I started panicking because we couldn't believe what we were hearing. She then said "I still can't find it on this machine, just give me a minute and I'll try another machine." This midwife had absolutely no sense of urgency about her. While we were still panicking she just casually said "I can't put you in a room yet, we have someone pushing."

With no luck on the second machine and after what seemed like a lifetime, we were finally taken to one of the labour rooms. At this point my pain was rapidly increasing, and so was our state of panic. While frantically trying to find her heartbeat on a third machine, the midwife who initially saw us was holding me down on my back in the attempt to hold me still. Of course, it didn't help as it put me in even more excruciating pain. At that point, I felt like I was dying.

After what felt like hours, an anaesthetist came in to give me an epidural. Beforehand, all the pain relief I was given wasn't helping. My pain finally settled once the epidural started working. An Obstetrician was still trying to find her heartbeat, finally looked at us and said "I'm so sorry, there's no heartbeat." Those words will haunt us for the rest of our lives. In complete shock and disbelief, my partner rushed out of the room to call my parents.

I don't recall much of what happened after the news was finally broken to us, but I do recall still trying to feel if she was moving. Some more time passed and my parents came in to see us before I gave birth. At that point, I was very drowsy and slept a little.

After my parents went home, my cervix was checked and it was time for me to start pushing. My daughters shoulders were a little stuck, so my midwife asked if she could give me an episiotomy (to make her job easier). I declined, as I knew naturally tearing was easier to heal than having an episiotomy, and she let out a big sigh (as if it was an inconvenience to her). Finally, at 3:48am - exactly 6 hours after checking in to the hospital - our beautiful daughter Luna entered the world peacefully sleeping. My partner and I were in awe of how beautiful she was.

Later when my parents came back to see us, my midwife said to them "it's just one of those things that happen." None of us could believe the lack of empathy she was showing towards us and our situation. Months later we had found out she said the exact same thing to another bereaved family, whose daughter was stillborn a few months prior to Luna.

On a positive note, we did have a few incredible midwives look after us during the few days we were in hospital. After having such a horrific experience, and having multiple midwives being so insensitive towards us and our situation, I strongly believe bereavement training needs to be made mandatory every year. The amount of stories around birth trauma, I believe, is disgusting. It is almost always because of healthcare professionals who are overworked and don't know how to handle specific situations with empathy.

My second birth was also traumatic. However, none of the healthcare professionals were at fault. I won't go in to detail with this birth, but all thanks to the very quick thinking of an incredible Obstetrician (who had just briefly read up on the notes in my file about Luna), I was rushed to have an emergency Cesarean. I was put to sleep and in 2 minutes, my son was born - perfect, healthy and alive.

This is just my experience, but something needs to change.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story.