

Submission  
No 624

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I am 31 years old, and my partner and I have 3 children. All of our antenatal appointments/births have happened at [REDACTED] Hospital. I suffer from a previous neurological condition called transverse myelitis that damaged the L4 - L5 regions of my spine when I was 13. I have severe incontinence and loss of movement and sensation in both of my legs but am able to walk, and obviously carry a baby!

Each pregnancy has been easy, very little nausea and no other major complications.

I had spoken to an anaesthetist at one of my antenatal appointments for my first pregnancy about whether an epidural would be ok as I had damage in my spine from the previous transverse myelitis. The anaesthetist was a registrar and she said she couldn't see a problem with having one.

I was 40 weeks and 3 days when labour started. Everything progressed naturally. After 2 days of contractions at home, it finally came time to go to the hospital and I wanted an epidural because I was exhausted. The anaesthetist on said he would get me to sign a waiver for it as he was worried it could result in more damage to my spine, so I stuck it out without it, had some gas and morphine, and ended up having a very calm birth although a ventouse was needed as well as an episiotomy to bring my boy safely into the world. The midwives and OB that performed the procedure were amazing, I couldn't have asked for a better first experience. I should also mention that I did no antenatal classes or preparation because my partner and I could not make the times that they were held.

My second pregnancy was during Covid, just after the first lot of lockdowns, and so my preparation for birth was even less than the first. I also felt more confident having done it before so naively I didn't think I needed to do any. I spoke again to another anaesthetist just to make sure everyone was on the same page that I would not have an epidural due to my nerve damage. My iron levels were on the lower side this pregnancy and was automatically booked in for an iron infusion. The day before my due date I had a routine appointment with an OB (a different one to the one at my first birth).

I was already noticing some discharge that looked to me like my mucous plug, but even after an internal examination she booked me in for an induction for the following week just because that was her way of doing things. I really didn't want to be induced, and luckily for me my contractions actually started that afternoon after the appointment. I spent the next day contracting at home and then the following morning we went into the hospital. I had tested positive for GBS at the 36 week routine check so knew they wanted to give me antibiotics during labour. I was 4cm dilated when I got there and was hooked up to the antibiotics straight away.

The midwives were amazing, I used some gas and decided to stay on the bed - it's not the most comfortable to have a cannula in your wrist while trying to move around between contractions, and my left leg was shaking from the pain/exhaustion. I was planning to have some morphine again for the pain but things progressed quite quickly, the contractions were coming very close together and the pain became absolutely unbearable. It felt as though I had alarm bells ringing through my body. There was nothing I could do to stop from screaming. At some point one of the midwives checked the baby's heart rate and told me it was going down and we needed to try and get them out quickly. The OB's appeared and made the call to use

forceps as bubs head was not down far enough. It all happened very quickly. They administered a local anaesthetic, performed an episiotomy and pulled my second little boy out while trying to coach me to push at the same time. My son endured a small gash under his right eye from the forceps and cried for at least 20 minutes when he came out. I kept trying to get him to latch and see if I could calm him down, all while getting stitched up. Every time my son would wake from sleep he cried as if he was reliving the moment. In fact he has only just started to wake happy nearly two and a half years on. I remember a week after his birth standing in the shower at home sobbing and thinking 'what the fuck just happened?'

I want to be clear that I don't believe that anyone did anything wrong. Everyone was just doing their job. If anything I blame myself for not being better informed about every aspect of birth. This leads me to think why on earth don't we get taught this stuff in school? A woman's body has this INCREDIBLE ability to build a human from scratch and then deliver it into this world, instead we seem to just focus on the logistics and not the physiological or emotional aspects of what is usually the biggest moment of a women's life. I can't help but wonder, if I had had the same midwives throughout both of my pregnancy journeys, who knew me personally and my medical history, and had the time to properly inform me on EVERY aspect of birth, including the (sometimes necessary) interventions, so that I could make a birth map that suited ME and MY preferences, would my second birth be as traumatic?

If anyone deserves anything from collecting this information it's the midwives. They are fucking super heroes. Yet their working conditions are ridiculous and I don't believe their knowledge and skills are respected among other medical professionals. These women are burning the candle at both ends to safely deliver more little tax payers into the world and yet the patient to carer ratio in public hospitals doesn't include the babies, so they are constantly chasing their tails trying to care for everyone.

I have since had a very healing cesarean birth for my third baby, a little girl, after working closely with my woman's health physiotherapist and deciding that my pelvic floor would not take another vaginal birth. I ended up going under general anaesthetic as we wanted to avoid putting anything in my spine, and everything went perfectly.

Having had a daughter I now feel a major responsibility to teach her the power she holds and how capable her body is of growing and birthing a baby. Hopefully this birth trauma inquiry brings about the changes needed to empower women about their choices in birth and to better support the amazing people that work in this field.