

Submission
No 629

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my baby girl in 2020. She was diagnosed in utero with needing open heart surgery to correct a heart anomaly (TGA) with 95% expected success. After the birth, I held her only a few seconds (I had been well prepared for this) before she was whisked off to prepare for her first procedure pre op. After I birthed the placenta and got some stitches I was wheeled over to her in a huge hurry to make it just in time to properly meet her and see her before her procedure. After this very fragile moment and having her again taken away after a few minutes of seeing her, one of the paediatric cardiologists called me and my husband into a side room with approx 6 other student doctors and before we knew what we were in for, proceeded to tell us what to expect with her within the next 30 years.

All of a sudden it was like a TGA lecture. He used words such as 'brain damage' and went on to list likely outcomes like ADHD, potential further surgeries in childhood and adulthood and so much more. I could not believe what I was hearing. I walked out of there feeling I had made a complete mistake going forward with the birth. The high from birthing that I was feeling - even under the circumstances - and the high of having met my child for the first time was squashed utterly. Rather than focus on the procedure at hand, we were now looking at a very uncomfortable and completely overwhelming future. My husband and I practically crawled out of the room both in tears whilst being watched by this crowded room of strangers. It was days later while still in the hospital (we were there 2 weeks in total) that I realised this 'meeting' had been completely inappropriate.

The timing was so off it was crazy. I had not even been asked for consent to have a room full of people listening in. The delicate nature of having met baby for the first time and simply get through our first procedure was ignored. I would never have chosen to hear any of this. I filed a complaint at the hospital and they agreed the timing was inappropriate, as was the nature of the chat and confirmed this 'meeting' was not at all protocol but of the doctors own volition. None of the other people in the wards with us had had this 'meeting'. A day or so later the doctor himself came to apologise to me and said he felt I was too 'out of it' to receive the information properly. I explained I'd just given birth and that my child was going in for a first procedure pre major surgery. I also explained that i had not been alerted to any of this information previously at any appointment.

He continued to say I was too out of it to understand and that he liked being completely 'honest'. His apology had no understanding of what had actually taken place, the stolen moment, the traumatic nature of the information, not to mention the fact that it was a completely unnecessary lecture. I have since spoken to my daughter's surgeon and cardiologist and though some of the things he claimed in that meeting were statistically possible, I was informed they are certainly not fact. I don't feel I will ever erase that conversation from my mind with its horrible predictions and brutal timing. I often wonder what parenting would be like if I'd never heard his horrible words.

I have undergone therapy over this and continue to speak to professionals, but still have so much work to do and beliefs to undo from this traumatic conversation. I feel a very important moment for me was violated and I feel we were used as guinea pig parents essentially for this

doctor and his student training purposes. He has no idea on the impact and long lasting effects of what he did and I really pray he is no longer allowed to take these precious minutes and future from any parent ever again.