

Submission
No 574

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I think being warm and caring to women is the most important thing you can do as an obstetrician or midwife. Stop acting like the pregnant woman is just a passenger in their own birth while you call all the shots and "deliver the baby". Not all are like this obviously and I was so impressed with 98% of the midwives that I came across - they are amazing.

I feel lucky that the first time I gave birth it was spontaneous and natural. While the contractions were 1000% intense during my (very fast) labour, it was incredible when I had that baby in my arms and so rewarding that I'd done it by myself, without interventions or much pain relief. It was powerful and I was on a high afterwards, able to enjoy my baby and soak in the skin-to-skin time.

The second time I gave birth was so different. I am sure if I didn't have the positive experience and confidence in myself from my first time I'd be traumatised right now - especially if I wanted a third child. Instead I just feel disappointed/regretful/resentful that the positive birth I wanted was taken away from me.

To summarise, I ended up with an induction that I didn't want to have, and as a result of that I ended up in stirrups with a vacuum delivery and episiotomy and about 7 people staring at my vagina while I pushed as hard as I could to save my baby and pooped myself during the process. My baby's heartrate had dropped catastrophically low and I could hear the urgency in the doctor's voice as she was readying to take another shot with the vacuum. I had no time to process what was happening but I assumed my baby wasn't going to make it (I am forever lucky that he did). My partner nearly fainted afterwards. I was shaking and felt cold and weak afterwards from the shock.

Induction was recommended based on growth scans that are notoriously inaccurate in later stages of pregnancy. My first baby was small hence they'd suggested the scans. They said the risk of stillbirth increased beyond 39 weeks, but ironically it was the induction that nearly killed him - it was much much too fast (only 2 hours from onset of contractions to his birth). He turned out to be 3kg, a small but unproblematic size. I had discussed my concerns about induction many times (given my first labour was so fast), and I was right to worry. I don't think a one-size-fits-all approach to assessing risk is ideal. The risk of induction for a woman with a history of fast labour should be weighed against the low risk of baby staying inside where he was happy and safe. I also knew my belly was much bigger than it was with my first baby as I could compare the photos, and I'd told them that. Fetal heartrate monitoring also went well and showed he was doing well. So in hindsight I wish I'd just let nature take its course.

We arrived at the hospital at 3pm to get our induction underway, but due to the busyness of the birthing suite that night, it wasn't until 2am they inserted the balloon catheter. I understand it's a public hospital and the system is overwhelmed sometimes, but no one bothered to even call us to give an update as the hours ebbed away. While some of the midwives were absolutely amazing, for some doctors it's like it's just their job and you're another irritating customer they have to deal with, and they know everything/have all the power over your body and birth. It's like they forget (or don't care) that you have feelings and you're about to face a hugely daunting experience, one of the most important experiences of your life. I'd been psyching myself up all week to face that induction and was scared as hell. By 10pm that evening while waiting to be seen I was crying with the emotions of it all. I felt so forgotten about and overwhelmed. The obstetrician who put the balloon catheter in had an un-friendly curt manner and barely acted as if I was even in the room while I'm in stirrups with her performing a painful process in my vagina. She wasn't apologetic for starting at 2am, it was as if I shouldn't expect to think I'm important when they've come from doing emergency C-sections.

By 7am when the midwife came to bring us down to the birthing suite to break my waters I'd had about 3-4 hours of dreadful quality sleep, ahead of only giving birth and becoming a newborn mum again.

My second experience of giving birth would be horrific and traumatic for most women. I feel that inductions are probably not in every woman's best interest, they take away your confidence in your own body to give birth and in my case they resulted in interventions I wouldn't have had if I'd given birth naturally, yet they seem so common these days. I'd like to know more about the overall big picture of how many of them end like mine did, and if there is a next time for me I definitely won't be agreeing to extra scans or induction.