

Submission
No 563

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I experienced the most divine, uncomplicated pregnancy with my first child, with labour starting naturally at 40 weeks gestation. In our regional area, we do not have access to a continuity of care program or birthing options such as birth centres or home birth midwives. I laboured at home with my partner for 8 hours before we went to our regional hospital, excited for the arrival of our beautiful baby.

I was initially assessed and supported by a lovely midwife (who I had never met) who read, understood and followed our birth preferences. Unfortunately, a shift changeover occurred a few hours after arriving at the hospital and the midwife who was allocated to us significantly impacted on our birthing experience.

Immediately, she requested for me to be reassessed to see how dilated I was. She then told me that I needed support to speed up my labour as I was getting tired and they were worried that my baby would start to get stressed (I was in fact coping fine with labour and my baby was showing no signs of distress). I insisted that they wait another hour, during which we requested heat packs with her response being "I am too busy with notes to get them". My husband showed the midwife our birth preferences who did not read them and placed them straight into my folder. My husband then spoke to a different midwife to request a change. Our midwife overheard this conversation and banned the requested change midwife from entering our room (the requested change midwife disclosed this information to me post birth).

I felt continually bullied to have my birth augmented by the midwife, so I then agreed to having my membranes ruptured. I was then bullied into a syntocinon drip but at this stage, I just wanted my labour to be over to escape the midwife. I ignored the midwife for the rest of my labour and started pushing when I had a bearing down urge. I was standing leaning against a bed. The midwife told me that I needed to stop pushing so she could check if I was dilated enough. She told me I needed to get on the bed for her to check as she had a bad back and couldn't bend down to check while I was standing.

She then put me on the bed, on my back with my feet in stirrups and confirmed I could start pushing - in a position that I had clearly stated on my birth preferences I never wanted to be in. I couldn't push in this position and found it incredibly uncomfortable. I was so fearful of the midwife that I was unable to articulate this to her or my husband. She then told me that our baby's heart rate was dropping and that I wasn't pushing hard enough, long enough or well enough. I had never pushed a baby out before, I didn't know how to do it. She did not coach me but instead told me what a terrible job I was doing.

She then left the room to get more midwives who placed me on my side, a position I was able to push in. They told me I needed to birth my baby now or they will have to get the forceps - a threat in my most vulnerable time. They gave me an episiotomy without any anesthetic or warning - I can still feel the pain and sensation, I liken it to using scissors to cut meat in the

kitchen. I then birthed my baby and had an instant feeling of relief that it was over, not joy that my first child had been born.

I had stated clearly that I did not want the injection to release my placenta. This was given to me a few minutes after giving birth, without my consent and again without my knowledge. The midwife then pulled on the umbilical cord to remove the placenta, with the cord snapping from the placenta. At 20 mins post party, I was taken to theatre to have my placenta removed, a situation that could have been completely avoided if the midwife had listened to my preferences, my body and spoken to me about how I wanted to birth.

I was then separated from my baby for the next two hours while in theatre - an hour of this time was spent with me laying in the theatre waiting for the anaesthetist to arrive as it was a Saturday night. A time that I could have spent bonding with my baby. During this two hours, my husband was left alone in a room with our daughter. No one checked on him and he didn't know what to do with our daughter who wanted to feed and not knowing why I was taking so long.

Once I was reunited with my family, the delivering midwife came into our room and told me how worried she was about me and how stressed she was, and how my daughter needs a feed ASAP. What was meant to be another joyous moment of me meeting my daughter was turned into another moment of unnecessary stress at the hands of the midwife.

Throughout my whole experience, I felt bullied and belittled. Unnecessary intervention was completed on me that I did not consent to. This had a significant impact on my ability to bond with my daughter and heal post partum as I thought it was my fault.

All women deserve to be treated with respect and compassion at their most vulnerable moments. All women deserve access to continuity of care. All women deserve the right to choose to birth in the way they want, be it in a birth centre, hospital or at home. All women deserve to emerge from birth both emotionally and physically well. It is not a big ask.

I refuse to believe that the frightening statistics surrounding birth are necessary or we as human beings would go extinct. The system needs to change immediately.