

Submission  
No 565

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 8 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

I had my first baby during the Omicron COVID wave, September 9, 2021, at [REDACTED] Hospital. I had been working from home as a teacher up until the day my waters broke, two weeks early. We were currently on our 10th day of isolation after being a close contact due to an obstetrician having COVID. During this time, and the months leading-up to my birth, I was avoiding any social contact due to the risk of COVID. At the time of my pregnancy there was also still some uncertainty about pregnant women getting the vaccination (having previously been told by doctors not to). I had a vaccination, but was still fearful. To go to every doctor's appointment and scan without my partner being allowed in the room was isolating, and then to become a close contact from the obstetrician felt very defeating. My waters broke at 7pm on September 8, and I was advised to go into hospital.

As we were close contacts everyone had to put on the full PPE gear. I felt like my husband and myself were ignored and neglected for a few hours and our 'close contact' status was a burden on the medical staff. My husband was then advised to go home, and I spent the next 8 hours with increasingly painful contractions 5 minutes apart. I was not once visited by a midwife, and at 5am on September 9 I remember finally calling them in to beg for my husband to be able to come back to support me. I was offered Gas and used this for a few hours as the contractions got stronger. After a few more hours I asked for an epidural as the pain was becoming too much and exhaustion set in. During this time, I was checked for dilation (an incredibly painful experience – I still don't know why) and told I was only 1cm dilated. I then confirmed I would need the epidural if this was the case.

I was told repeatedly by midwives I needed to wait for the epidural as the doctor was busy, making me feel like my pain was a burden and I was being impatient. During this time (and unbeknownst to everyone except me) I had progressed to 10cm dilated and was in excruciating pain, to the point I was blacking out. Finally, the doctor came to give me the epidural and after three failed attempts (one of which he muttered that he may need his supervisor to assist him) I finally received my pain relief. Unfortunately, he missed the mark and I experienced a spinal tap and couldn't feel anything from my waist down. Then the midwives told me that I was fully dilated and baby was almost falling out – I was relieved. I had to wait an hour to feel the contractions again and for the spinal tap to wear off a bit before pushing. I pushed for three hours, with no success.

The midwives then induced me with an IV drip to bring on stronger contractions. By this stage the spinal tap had completely worn off and I could feel extremely strong contractions again at 10cm dilated. At this time I remember thinking that I just wanted to die for the pain to stop, something I am so ashamed of to this day. During this time, I was screaming in pain. A birthing book I read told me to verbalise my pain, however, the midwife told me I needed to stop screaming and that I didn't want to have no voice for when my baby arrives.

More waiting and finally I saw an obstetrician, who advised me I would go to surgery to have forceps removal. I still needed to wait. During this time, I remember just wishing I was dead as I was in so much pain, while the nurses read me my rights and made me sign my life away. I remember being told I just needed to be more patient and that there were women ahead of

me in a worse way than me. Finally, I got to go to surgery. By this time my baby was in distress (his heartrate had dropped), so they were quick to perform an episiotomy and use forceps to remove baby. Baby was healthy, but small (2.4kg). We got back to my hospital room at 7pm, September 9. We were offered a leftover cheese sandwich (it had been 24 hours since I had eaten), a 22-hour labour, and my husband was told he had to leave for the night. I begged them to let him stay but he was sent home.

I was so exhausted but remember the night midwife laughing and asking me “you don’t think you are going to get a chance to sleep, do you?” like I was an idiot. The midwife also pressured me to have a shower unassisted. I remember standing up and blood gushing to the floor. I then had to shower myself unassisted with a catheter in, not being able to bend to pick up the washer when it fell to the floor. My days in hospital were ok, as my husband was there, but I counted down the minutes at night until he could return (night times I was on my own as the hospital was understaffed and I was scolded if I pressed the button for assistance, and praised if I could go the night without asking for assistance).

By the third day in hospital I was begging to leave as I was not allowed any visitors, nor to leave the white-walled room. I was advised to stay because of my difficult labour and other health concerns, but I felt like I was going crazy in that room. Thank goodness I had a different midwife who saw how desperate I was and listened to me saying I could not survive another night alone, and let me go through the discharge process. I remember the doctors asking me the day after the birth if I had any concerns or complaints about my birth. I thought this was a strange question and at the time was just happy to have a healthy baby so I said no. On reflection, I have so many concerns and complaints.

I consider my birth traumatic. I suffered from undiagnosed Postnatal depression and anxiety for a good 7 months after the birth, and I believe my traumatic birth contributed greatly to this. I am only now (my son is almost 2) seeking psychiatrist help to unpack some of what happened during the birth, and to try to prepare me for having another child. The trauma of this birth has put myself and my husband off having more children.