

Submission
No 569

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I was the 1 in 3. To this day, birth trauma still haunts me. My daughter is 4yr and 4 months old and it still feels like yesterday. I chose the “centering” option for my public maternity care model. Promised that we’d have the same midwife for our lessons and checkups but in a group setting. I enjoyed the group setting, to this day I’m still in touch with most of the mums but I’d never recommend this model of care to another mother. We never had the same midwife, we had a class full of not so “low-risk” pregnancies leading to longer checkups and not enough allocated time to thoroughly check all the women, let alone complete our lesson. With every new midwife I’d have to re-explain that something didn’t feel right. I’d had constant braxton hicks since about 16wks but they weren’t textbook. But no-one listened to me. No-one had the time to stop and think that maybe my instincts were correct. I was ignored, brushed to the side, treated as a number, looked upon like I was making things harder or wasting time.

The midwives weren’t malicious, they’re merely overworked and have been crushed by the system. Fast forward, 34+3 and the braxton hicks have become regular and uncomfortable with back pain and cramping. But I don’t ring the hospital because I know exactly how I’ll be treated. They subsided overnight and I went to work the next day. 34+4 they return, regular again. I call the hospital and I’m told to “just take a Panadol”. A pre-term mother is told to JUST TAKE PANADOL simply so she’s not an inconvenience for the ward!! Surprisingly the Panadol doesn’t work so I drive home from work and go into hospital. I’m met by a midwife who’s clearly in the wrong job. I’m hooked up to monitors while being spoken to like I’m a huge inconvenience. She tells me I’m just having braxton hicks. I ask what the difference is between Braxton hicks and real contractions.

Her response “contraction dilate the cervix, braxton hicks don’t”. As simple as that. However I hadn’t had a cervical check so she had no clue what my cervix was like yet just based on my gestation alone made an assumption that surely I wasn’t in labour! Skip ahead a couple of hours and I’m admitted, at high risk of pre-term labour, told I’ll have my baby in the next few hours to 7 days. Overnight bubs baseline heart rate is low, I’m glued to the machines. Not told what I can and can’t do, glued to a bed. Can’t sleep. The midwives come to check me multiple times but completely ignore me as they talk about their weekend. They don’t answer any of my questions truthfully, just answer like I’m an idiot, incapable of understanding. The next day the monitors completely loose bubs heart rate. The room fills with people and I’m rushed off for my worst nightmare - an emergency csection. The OB was the shining light in this whole experience. The only person who saw me as a real person, feeling real emotions. He paused, he spoke to me, he asked how I felt.

But he’s still been broken by the system. I ask for skin to skin and delayed cord clamping if possible. He says he’ll try but given her gestation it’s not likely. She comes out screaming, breathing, apgar of 7..... yet she’s taken to the resus table instead of given to me. Her cord is cut immediately. 5mins later she crashes and is rushed to the nursery and placed on CPAP. I’m left alone, baby less. The science is there. The science says skin-to-skin and delayed cord clamping both help a baby translation to the world. I still wonder to this day, could we have saved her from the trauma of CPAP, the trauma of separation, the trauma of being poked and prodded and treated like a voodoo doll if she’d simply been given a chance to be with me. To

feel my skin. To feel my heartbeat and regulate hers in rhythm with mine. I'll never know but my god I wish we'd tried. The trauma doesn't end there but I don't have much more left in me to continue writing. I lay in my bed in excruciating pain next to the resus table once I'd left recovery. Only able to hold her hand, but in reality all I could feel were cords and bandages. She was sent to a hospital 1hr away and I was left alone in the hospital. She was 28hrs old before I got reunited with her. I had to scream and swear down the hall of the maternity ward in order to finally get a hospital transfer.

I waited for 10hrs to be transferred. That's 10hrs I wasn't holding my baby. That's 10hrs more than necessary my baby was left cold and scared in a cot. She spent 3wks in the NICU/SCN. I had to overhear a paediatrician say to the nurse "I'm just not convinced there's not something wrong with this baby". I had to leave my daughter while I returned home everyday empty handed. My instincts screamed at me to hold her as much as possible but I was told to not hold her too much as it took up too much of her energy. Again - catch up with the science!! A baby being with their mother only speeds up their journey of recovery. Some nurses were unemotional, unsupportive, pushy, lazy. It felt like she belonged to them, not to me. This experience carried into my postpartum. Lost, confused, disconnected. It took us months to get back on track.

Fast forward to my second baby. I fought hard to be a part of the MGP program. I educated myself. I advocated for myself (sadly for things I shouldn't even have to!). I fought hard and got the most beautiful, natural, VBAC birth. My redemption. What I needed to learn that my body wasn't broken, the system was broken. The difference - educating myself and continuity of care. A midwife that when I mentioned the early braxton hicks got me to go on light duties at work, that listened to me, trusted my innate instincts, worked TOGETHER with me to achieve what I longed to achieve. Because of this I took this baby to 40+5!!! If only I was listened to the first time around. Every woman deserves continuity of care. Every woman deserves to be listened to. Every woman deserves to leave birth feeling like I felt the second time around! Sadly too many women leave traumatised and this is just not necessary. It's time for change. It's time for the medical system to catch-up with the science. Women need their power back!