

Submission
No 577

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My trauma started during pregnancy and I also unfortunately experienced birth trauma.

A congenital abnormality was picked up during my 20 week scan during my first pregnancy. The doctor OB at [REDACTED] Hospital who sat with my husband and I to provide the details, seemingly had no idea what he was talking about, and scared us to the point that we believed we would either lose the baby, require in utero surgery on the baby, or that our baby would potentially only live with one lung. The exact wording was “well, people can survive with only one lung.”

This was after fumbling through papers containing information he’d printed from Google.

During that same pregnancy, I was admitted to emergency to rule out a potential Pulmonary Embolism. The female doctor I dealt with during emergency treated me like I was a hysterical lunatic, and had zero empathy for my experience as a pregnant woman who all of a sudden was required to undergo procedures that women should avoid at all costs during pregnancy (such as X-Ray, CT Scan). She did nothing to assist with my concerns about these procedures, at one point she said that I could go home if I wanted, “but might die in my sleep”. As an aside, she also commented on my weight after making me jump on the scales during admission.

I had to move from the MGP program at [REDACTED] to the [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] so that my baby’s congenital abnormality could be monitored closely for the remainder of my pregnancy and I was relieved to not have to return to [REDACTED] Hospital. Even driving but the hospital now makes me sick to my stomach and anxious.

My baby was luckily fine upon birth (a birth in which I suffered a third degree tear after being encouraged to get the baby out quicker as “doctors are waiting at the door with forceps”). I was coached to push when I didn’t feel ready, and completely rushed based on the hospital’s unnecessary timeline. I was also given no choice but to wear a continuous monitor, even though baby had shown 0 signs of distress during the entire pregnancy or pre-labour (2.5 days).

Even though baby was fine, we were forced to have baby undergo CT, a choice that our highly respected and experienced surgeon later questioned, as he also deemed it unnecessary. This meant additional exposure to radiation for our baby (as they also needed a CT at a later date) at less than 24 hours old.

After my surgical repair to fix my tear, I was wheeled into a room, unable to walk, and left alone while my husband and baby were in special care. The only contact I had was via a button to get the nurse’s attention, who seemed annoyed by me and my request to be wheeled to special care to have skin to skin and feed my baby. Also seemed inconvenient for her to have to hand me my bag so that I had access to my phone and snacks, having not eaten for 3 days.

When we were discharged, we received no follow up care from the hospital, even with my baby’s condition and my significant injury.

My breastfeeding journey was horrific. A different opinion and advice from every single midwife/nurse we saw during the 5 day hospital stay. I was in pain and my nipple injuries getting worse, when the lactation consultant advised that baby was feeding well and I had plenty of milk, and sent me on my way. I continued feeding baby, who had a noted tongue tie but “did not need it fixed” until I bled, and baby was drinking blood in the milk, and even throwing some of it up. To be sent home with a baby who had a lung concern, and to see them vomit blood, was deeply traumatic. I went to multiple breastfeeding clinics with the local health district nurses and again, different advice every time. This led to having to exclusively pump and bottle feed until after baby’s tongue tie was corrected and my damage healed. Baby did not get back on to the breast until almost 3 months, and all of this could have been avoided if the tongue tie was taken seriously on days 2/3 in hospital.

I opted for a home birth with a private midwife for my second baby to avoid being coerced into a c section by the local hospital, and although it was a beautiful pregnancy, labour and birth, we experienced shoulder dystocia and

baby wasn't breathing when born. Also a second, third degree tear. The midwife acted quickly and was able to assist with baby being born and quickly had them breathing. Baby is fine, thankfully. However I then went into shock and experienced a retained placenta. I then needed to be transferred to hospital for surgery. Again, separated from my baby.

Even though I believe it was pretty obvious that after all of this, I was experiencing PTSD and postnatal depression, my private midwife did not offer any assistance in this space. No referrals to mental health services or the like. I look back now and feel incredibly let down by the lack of warmth I received in my postnatal care.

When I hear stories of obstetric violence, coercion, cascade of intervention etc., from other women who birthed in the hospital system, I am mortified. I have only a couple of friends who have experienced spontaneous labours - the rest have all been pushed into inductions or scheduled for c sections for reasons that are not based on evidence.

There needs to be more learning opportunities for families during pregnancy to empower birthing women and families and to educate them around consent. So many women believe their experience is normal. But their trauma says otherwise.