

Submission
No 580

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 8 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

For the birth of my first child in 2022 my model of care was through a Midwifery Group Practice in a large hospital in Sydney. As I had a low risk pregnancy I had opted to have a home birth through the MGP.

Throughout my pregnancy I felt supported by my midwife and confident with my care.

My daughter was born after 41 weeks. A few days after going past my "estimated due date" my midwife spoke to me about post dates assessments if I did not go into spontaneous labour by a certain time. I discussed how I did not want to be induced unless it was medically necessary.

I had quite a long labour. I felt that I was able to advocate for myself and was listened to by my midwife when discussing whether or not to transfer to hospital. The advice to transfer to hospital was given as I had a slight fever and my baby's heart rate was slightly high and my contractions had stalled. I asked for more time at home and was given it, however, eventually we transferred to hospital. Once we got to hospital my experience changed. An Obstetrician came in to check my progress. I was 9cm dilated however was told by the OB that as my labour was going on so long, she thought that my baby would not fit through my pelvis and that I would need to have a c-section. I advocated to be given more time as I was being given fluids/antibiotics for my fever. I was given an additional half an hour.

When the OB came back in she advised that as my contractions had not come back that she recommended I have a c-section. I again advocated against the c-section and asked for more time. I felt very pressured by the hospital to have a c-section and did not feel that I needed it. I said to the OB that I didn't feel like I was being given the choice to give birth any other way safely and that I felt like I was being pressured to book a c-section to avoid having to have an 'emergency c-section' where I would be put under general anaesthetic - so said that I would sign the form but that I was only doing it because I didn't feel supported to give birth any other way safely and that I was not happy about having to go down this path. I advocated for immediate skin to skin and for delayed cord clamping and was told if it was safe to do so these requests would be honoured.

As soon as the OB left the room after that discussion my contractions returned. I felt angry and unheard as I was being wheeled to theatre as I whole heartedly did not think the c-section was necessary and that I just needed more time than what the hospital was willing to give me. Upon arriving to theatre my husband was not allowed to come through at first (whilst I was being given a spinal block) due to hospital policy. Whilst I was being given the spinal block another Obstetrician from the hospital came in and spoke to me saying that the original obstetrician I had been speaking to had come to see him and told him my situation and that based off what I had said regarding the c-section - I had not really given consent and wanted to discuss other options he could possibly offer me.

He checked my dilation and told me I was 10cm dilated by this time and my contractions had returned. He explained that a c-section at this time would be risky as my baby had already started to come down in my pelvis (eg. they would have to pull her all the way back out to do a c-section). He offered me the option of a birth assisted by trial of forceps.

I asked about the risks involved in this type of birth. He explained them to me and also explained normally with this type of birth I would be given an episiotomy to reduce the risk of a 3rd or 4th degree tear. I asked about the chance of this type of tear happening without the episiotomy and asked whether he would be happy to go ahead with the trial of forceps if I declined the episiotomy. He checked my perineum and said that he was happy to go ahead without the episiotomy as long as I understood that I was risking a tear that could be worse than the episiotomy. We went ahead and had a successful trial of forceps. I only ended up with a very small 2nd degree tear.

My daughter was born healthy with great APGAR scores. This made me feel that the pressure for the c-section had been so unnecessary as my daughter was fine.

After coming out of recovery my husband was told he could not stay with me as I was in a shared room. I understood why he had to leave, however felt worried about how I would care for my daughter all by myself as I was not able to stand up due to the spinal block still being effective. I was told I could buzz for the nurses for help. I still felt anxious as I was tired from being in labour for so long and could not get up to pick up my daughter. I asked for her to be placed in my arms so that I wouldn't have to worry about waiting for a nurse if she became distressed and I couldn't get to her.

The following morning both Obstetricians that had cared for me came to debrief with me the decisions that had been made and why the recommendations that had been given to me had been given. This did make me feel cared about and I appreciated this, however, as I was by myself (visiting hours had not started yet so my husband was not back) and I had not really slept at all because I had been holding my daughter all night, looking back, I do not think I retained much of the conversations with both Obstetricians.

Following my daughter's birth I felt like an immense failure. Whilst I felt like I had midwives (and later at the hospital, Obstetricians) who cared about my physical and mental health, and who listened to me when I was advocating for myself - I did not feel like I was given the chance to have a natural birth safely once at the hospital. I felt like without the immense pressure to have the c-section, and given more time, all the intervention I was given would not have been necessary.

It took me months to process the feeling of failure. Whenever I was asked about my daughters birth it would bring the feelings up and would often result in many tears once I was alone. I needed numerous birth debriefs, both with my midwives + with an outside provider before I

was able to speak about my daughter's birth without feeling shame for not being 'allowed' to give birth to her naturally.

Despite the feelings of failure around my daughters birth, and the feeling that the pressure to have a c-section was unnecessary. I am grateful that I was in the MGP as without midwives and doctors who listened to me, my daughter's birth would have involved many more unwanted interventions including a c-section - which would then impact the births of any future children I have.