

Submission
No 584

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth in ████████ NSW in 2020 and 2022. Both times I birthed healthy babies, but other than that they were vastly different experiences. My first birth was induced, and I chose to have an epidural. The risks of each of these choices were clearly explained to me by the obstetricians and midwives present, and I was allowed to make an informed decision for myself and my baby.

However, my second birth followed a natural labour, and I was refused pain relief as the midwives didn't believe I was in "active" labour. We presented to hospital around 3am, and was advised that I would be admitted at around 6am. However, when the midwives changed shifts at this time, the midwife who arrived allowed little room for me to make decisions regarding my own body. I asked repeatedly for an epidural, as I felt like I was progressing quickly and the pain was becoming too much, but due to a vaginal exam that showed I wasn't particularly dilated, the midwife only offered panadeine forte and sent me home with the promise that we could return to the hospital whenever we felt it necessary, and the midwives would have the anaesthetist waiting for me if I still wanted an epidural on my return. I was also informed at this stage that I couldn't receive an epidural as once it was given, the midwife couldn't leave me and she was too busy with planned inductions for this to happen. I was sent home around 9am, and my partner rang the midwife at around 10am to ask to return as the pain was becoming unbearable. The midwife told my partner to get me into the shower at home, as this is "all they would do" at hospital. I physically couldn't get into our shower at home due to the intensity of my labour, so rang again at 11am insistent that we return.

On our arrival the midwife we had been dealing with was no longer available, so we explained to the new midwife that we had been told the epidural would be waiting for me. This was not the case, and I was told that I would need another vaginal exam if they were even going to consider an epidural. I made it very clear that I didn't want a vaginal exam at this point, as I was in too much pain. But I was desperate for the epidural, as it had made my first birth bearable and actually enjoyable. I suffered through another excruciating vaginal exam at around midday, and was told I was only 4cm dilated which was still not "enough for an epidural". The midwife left the room, leaving my partner to support me through labour in the shower, with no pain relief. I continually rang the bell to ask for pain relief, but was repeatedly told that the anaesthetists were too busy and they would come as soon as they could.

The midwives changes shift again at 2pm, and this was the first time I had been assessed/examined by a midwife in hours, as they still didn't believe I was in "active labour", so had been with other women. I also feel that I was given less attention by the midwives because I was relatively quiet, whereas there were women in other rooms screaming, but ended up having their babies long after me. When the 2pm midwife arrived, I again begged for pain relief. At this point I felt my body beginning to push. The midwife attempted to check the baby's heart rate while I was standing in the shower (where I had spent most of my labour since 3am), but couldn't find the heart beat. This panicked my partner and myself, and I was told I needed to get up on the bed and lie on my back so she could find babies heartbeat. I told the midwife I couldn't physically do that, but she told me I had to, as she was concerned for baby's safety. I got myself up on the bed somehow, and as I did, the midwife saw that my baby was crowning. The fact that I was made to do something so unbelievably unnatural

whilst pushing a baby from my body is horrific in hindsight, all because the midwives had been “too busy” to have been regularly monitoring myself and baby while I was labouring.

Once the midwife realised that my daughter was being born, she rang the emergency buzzer and another midwife arrived instantly. My daughter was born within 5 minutes, and was born with an APGAR of 3. The midwives called the doctors in and my partner counted approx. 13 medical professionals in the room almost immediately. My baby needed immediate chest compressions, air, and a tube to drain fluid from her stomach.

Weeks later, when my partner and I lodged a complaint with the hospital about our care, we realised that had we followed the advice of the morning midwife and remained at home to progress the labour, there’s a good chance our daughter would have been born unresponsive in our bathroom, and most likely wouldn’t have survived.

I feel that births depend far too heavily on the circumstances of the hospital at the time. The staffing levels, the availability of anaesthetists, the availability of birth suites, the quality and training of midwives etc. FAR too much hangs in the balance, for what is one of the most risky and meaningful life events, and is something that families will remember forever. My partner was also traumatised by this experience, as he felt he was unable to support me fully, due to the midwives preventing me from receiving effective pain relief. He also wanted to catch the baby, but was unable to due to the rushed and traumatic circumstances.

Our midwives need to be better supported, so that they can provide better care for birthing people in the most vulnerable time of their lives. It is so incredibly unfair to make people feel that their safety and pain management depends on how “busy” their health professionals are.