

Submission
No 663

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Elaine, I'm 40 years old and I have a 5-year-old and a 2-year-old. I had both my babies at public hospital.

With my first baby, I received disrespectful, inappropriate, and abusive treatment in the late stages of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. I was not provided evidence-based information on induction or cesareans and felt coerced to have my waters broken, and then to have a cesarean. I was told inaccurate information about my baby's heart rate having dropped (which 3 years later, upon accessing my medical records, I realised had never happened). This caused tremendous stress in both me and my partner as we agreed to an emergency cesarean fearing for our baby's life.

I then developed an infection which saw me admitted back into hospital 10 days after my son was born. I was not admitted back into maternity ward as my infection started a day after I had been officially discharged by the midwives. I was twice left in the ER for hours while miscommunication happened between obstetricians and doctors in ER. I was not told I was septic and was mistreated by a doctor who had tried to convince me to have a cesarean earlier in the pregnancy, who insinuated that the infection was my fault for not having listened to her.

My son developed an RSV while back in hospital with me and the obstetricians in their daily visits to me refused to examine him, forcing my partner to take him to the ER (even though we were all inside a hospital, with a medical team).

I experienced birth trauma as a result of how I was treated. The way this affected me physically, emotionally, psychologically was evident when I got pregnant with my second child and would just start crying thinking about birth.

As part of dealing with this trauma, I was offered midwife-led continuity of care at _____ hospital for my second pregnancy and the difference in treatment and care were astonishing. I felt heard, listened to and respected as a mother and as a human being capable of making decisions. I was still provided biased evidence-based information and there were attempts by different doctors to make me agree to early inductions, additional ultrasounds and further appointments to the point I felt that I couldn't leave the room unless I agreed to what they were saying. The difference was I felt like I had my person in my midwife, and under her guidance felt empowered to call and cancel appointments with obstetricians in the hospital.

Even though my second son ended up being born via a cesarean as well, I was heard. In the end, it was my decision and I knew I would have been supported even if I hadn't agreed to a cesarean. This surgery went well, I had all my requests listened to: I could see the baby being pulled out, I could see him straight away. I was allowed to have music on while he was being born. Ultimately, I felt heard!

I believe every woman birthing should have access to unbiased evidence-based evidence, and most importantly access to midwife-led continuity of care models.