

Submission
No 679

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I was accepted into the Midwifery Group program when I fell pregnant in August 2019. My son was born in hospital on the 11th of May 2020. This is my first and only baby as I feel the labour and birth caused damage that I took years to recover from. For me, this meant the thought of having another baby was too traumatising.

Further along in my pregnancy when I had an ultrasound, I was informed that our baby was "measuring big". I was encouraged to book in for an induction at 38 weeks pregnant. I informed my partner and midwife that I would like to have an epidural for the birth. I was booked in for an induction on the 12th of May, 2020.

The day before my scheduled induction, I was to arrive at the hospital in the morning for application of "Prostin gel". I don't recall being told at the time that it could induce labour, I do remember being told that it could cause "tightenings" that were comparable to "period cramps". Due to recent covid lockdowns, my partner was permitted to stay with me for 2 hours after the first application of the prostin gel. He was then allowed to return for 2 hours later in the day.

When he arrived later in the day, I was experiencing cramps and was in a little bit of pain. He then had to leave. I was sharing a room with a woman who was earlier in her pregnancy and was in hospital to be checked with some spotting. She was staying overnight as a precaution.

By 7pm that night I was experiencing painful contractions that were lasting about a minute and were 1-2 minutes apart. With every contraction, I was silently trying to breathe because I did not want to bother or upset the woman on the other side of the thin curtain that divided the room I was staying in. I called the nurse several times and asked for pain relief and was offered a heat pack. I was vomiting from the pain. I called for the nurse again explaining that I could not handle the pain and that I needed an epidural. She told me that I could not have an epidural until I entered the birthing suite and once I was in the birthing suite, I was on a time limit. I was told I needed to wait until I was in labour before I could have my partner with me and have an epidural. So I remained in the room, trying to contain my noise from the pain of labour alone, without anyone to support me or advocate for me. Each time I rang the buzzer for assistance, I felt like I was inconveniencing the nurse who continually reminded me there was nothing more that could be done to help my pain. I remember wanting to call my partner but being unable to even make a phone call or send a text message in between contractions. The nurse asked me at one point if my "pain threshold is usually quite low", generally speaking I would have said it is quite high, but at this point my feelings had been invalidated for the whole time, I doubted everything I knew about myself. I felt gaslighted about what was happening in my body and my inability to handle what was merely "tightenings" that I agreed and said "I guess so". While I now know that these pains were contractions, at the time I second guessed everything I knew about myself and my body and I had nobody there to advocate for me or comfort me.

I moved to the shower between contractions to help with the pain. I was bleeding and I remember being in the shower screaming in pain, looking at the blood and hoping it was enough for someone to finally take me seriously. I felt completely helpless. I again requested an epidural, the nurse said that if I wanted an epidural she would need to check me to see if I was dilated enough to move to the birthing suite. I agreed, continuing to scream through contractions. At this point a different nurse arrived too. It was confirmed that I was 8cm dilated. They brought in a wheelchair to move me to the birthing suite. I remember catching a glimpse through the curtain of the woman who was in the room while all of this was happening and I apologised to her for the noise I had made whilst labouring alone.

The nurse who pushed me in a wheelchair instructed the ladies at the front desk of the ward to call my partner and my midwife, who was in the midwifery group program. When I arrived in the birthing room I was completely distraught and couldn't apply any coping strategies, feeling completely out of control. My partner arrived and we requested an epidural as I had previously made clear was my wish. I was told I was now too far along for an epidural. I was furious that I had already requested it multiple times and been declined due to a "time limit", not being far enough along and then being told I was too far along.

During the birth, I sustained a 3b tear despite an episiotomy. When my son was born, I was given a short time with him but then taken to theatre for surgery. When I came out of theatre, I was taken back to the maternity ward and left with my son, my partner needed to leave. I remember feeling alone.

Due to the tearing, I was required to stay in hospital for 3 days. Because of covid restrictions, I was allowed one visitor (the same one for the duration of my hospital stay) 2 hours at a time 2 x daily. I was exhausted, couldn't move, walk or lift and spent the first 3 days as a mother completely alone and isolated, aside from 2 hour visits twice daily from my partner. I remember counting down for the other 20 hours each day for those visits so that I could sleep, or have assistance to lift my son.

I was much more comfortable at home where I could be cared for and helped by my partner. I valued the visits from my midwife from the midwifery group program. She was able to check that my stitches were not getting infected. During one of the visits, my partner asked her if that's how births were supposed to be. She shook her head and I felt validated. She told us she had stayed at her daughter's house in that night so that she could be closer if I had gone into labour. She said she had called the hospital to check on whether I had gone into labour and was told I was okay and there was no need for her to come in'. This was not the case at all. She said she believed that by me being quite a tall woman, my body would have probably coped birthing my 4.1kg son at full term, rather than forcing my body to be ready by having an induction.

The process of having a baby felt so driven by a "time limit". I feel I was persuaded to have an induction to help the logistics of the birthing ward. I don't believe it was due to his high birth

weight or to protect me, as I sustained injuries regardless. 3 years later I am the one that suffers with ongoing pelvic floor issues so that Hospital could schedule my birth conveniently for their staffing and logistics.