

Submission
No 649

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 4 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I am in the process of planning for pregnancy, and am already finding my options and choices are narrowing based on diagnoses that are on my medical history. I understand the need for medical advice, and communicating risk but I am already feeling terrified by how much I feel that others are driving the process and controlling the direction of my birth should it happen. I was given a blood test, and then when results came in I was advised I would need to be given an injection after birth that has ramifications for me and my baby's ability to leave the hospital, and now that is on my file and will necessitate intervention. This wasn't explained before the test, and it makes me aware of how vigilant a woman needs to be because every interaction with a health care provider might mean inadvertently "consenting" to something that has down the line implications that you had no idea about. In the lead up to birthing, I am aware that in my local area there are limited options for birthing- one public and one private hospital. The only stories I know of from those of my friends who have birthed in this area have been highly traumatic. They have involved my friends feeling that things were done to them that they did not consent to or understand, and these impacted their experience and recovery and have resulted in extremely challenging post partum experiences and mental health challenges. How can it be that there is such a lack of positive experiences of such a special event in peoples lives? The private hospital has it listed on their website: " If you choose to have a birth plan:

Some people choose to have a birth plan. They see it as an opportunity to write down any thoughts or wishes they have about their labour and /or stay in hospital.

It is very important that you discuss your plan with your obstetrician and midwifery staff. This will give us an opportunity to let you know what we have available to meet your wishes and what is safe and practical according to your individual circumstances.

You will need to be flexible and be prepared to do things differently if complications arise for you or your baby"

Whilst I don't speak for all women, I can safely say that I don't know any woman believes that birth just follows the plan you make. We all hope it does, but there's an understanding that if something happens, things can change and go in a different direction. Reading this website's information as a pregnant woman made me feel as though birth plans are viewed as "hopes and wishes" that you can write down, like a "wish list" that's not really viewed as being possible from the outset. Already the narrative is that birth is something that is controlled by the hospital. Rather than birth being a natural process that women's body's know how to do, and hospitals are there to support that natural process and assist where medically that becomes necessary or where women invite that intervention. Birth has become so medicalised that my friends who have birthed spend an incredible amount of time and energy preparing for how to safely navigate the system! That shouldn't be a thing! There is so much fear needing to be worked through, because women approach birth fully expecting and preparing for having to fiercely advocate for themselves. And those who don't prepare in that way- often report being so surprised and shocked and traumatised by how they experienced the system- they felt unprepared for it to go that way. Women shouldn't have to prepare to be traumatised and take steps to prevent that... we should be able to birth without fear. Feeling unsafe has a negative impact on labour ... it's already challenging enough without these additional layers of fear of losing control of one's own body and experience.

Additionally, in my area there are extremely limited numbers of women who gain access to the midwifery program. Continuity of care is always talked about so highly, having the same people to support you through- but most of us won't get access and have to show up and be supported by strangers in our most vulnerable moment. If you have major surgery, you usually know your surgeon. When you go for an appointment with any healthcare provider, you know who you were booking in with and then for the most vulnerable and precious experience of a woman's life, you have no idea who will be supporting you through it? How is this even a thing?

It is not acceptable that so many women are having traumatizing births, it sets a child and a new mother on the trajectory of post traumatic stress at a time of sensitive brain development for the infant. It can start off motherhood with women feeling broken and confused. What is our society without people? And all people are born, it is such a significant event with far-reaching impacts- it should be supported to the highest degree because of its significance. It should be revered, and women cherished, nurtured and given control and choice- for all of life comes from birth. Babies should begin their life with their mum feeling so proud of herself, so safe and supported- so she can nurture her baby without having to process a traumatic birth.