

Submission
No 654

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I had a low risk, uncomplicated pregnancy in 2022

At 41+4 after 5 days of prodromal labour (night time contractions which ceased by morning) I went into active labour around 1400 on the 7/8. I presented to hospital approx 0200 on the 8/8 for assessment believing I was still in pre-labour but having trouble managing the pain at home. After approx 1hr in the MADU on ctg I had a cervical exam which determined I was approximately 9cm dilated. I was moved to the delivery suite where I continued to labour in the bath.

Around 0730 after shift change, the incoming midwife raised the possibility of breaking my waters in order to help progress the labour which I eventually consented to. Sometime around 0800 a team of doctors entered the room - with no introduction - discussed me and left soon after. Not long later a registrar returned and requested to perform a cervical exam which I consented to. Following this he proceeded to inform me that I would need a caesarean. Prior to this no issues had been discussed with me - I distress had been noted on any of the fetal checks and I was not feeling tired or struggling with the labour. When I questioned this decision the rationale was given that I had not progressed enough therefore they believed that baby was stuck and I was at risk of uterine rupture or an infection. What this assessment was based on was very unclear. Multiple painful cervical checks were completed and there was some dispute between the midwife and the registrar over how dilated I actually was. I initially declined the caesarean and requested more time. I was given one extra hour and told I would need to be on ctg - despite there still being no sign of fetal distress. When I was again assessed after 1hr it was determined that I had not progressed enough and would need progress to caesarean. When I again declined a more senior doctor was brought in to pressure me. I eventually consented to the procedure and my baby was born healthy at around 1130am. I had a fairly uncomplicated recovery however due to the excess fluid common in babies born by c-section initial latching and breastfeeding was difficult and delayed and as a result my milk production was delayed and the baby experienced significant jaundice.

In my birth debrief - which was conducted with a different team to the one that actually performed the procedure I again questioned the need for a surgical delivery and was informed that the baby was 'too big' and the wrong shape for my pelvis. At birth she was 3.905kg - a fairly average size and a normal shape for a baby - and at 167cm I am also of average size.

My concern is that my birth was overly medicalised and resulted in an unnecessary surgical procedure.

At no time did the midwives caring for me raise any concern that I may have needed a surgical delivery - the morning midwife was surprised at the suggestion stating she had suggested perhaps some syntocin to help progress the labour but had not expected a surgical outcome.

1 year on I continue to feel angry about the loss of autonomy I experienced and the pressure from the medical team to have what I believe was a completely unnecessary surgical procedure. As a health professional myself I can find no research which supports the push for caesarean based on my clinical picture.

I believe had I have chosen to birth in a less surgically orientated hospital my preference for a vaginal delivery would have been possible.

Neither I or my baby had shown any signs of distress or even fatigue.

I felt pressured to comply by the catastrophic outcomes given to me by the medical team that they stated would result from my continuing to labour naturally.

The risks of a caesarean at almost full dilation were not fully explained to me either before or after delivery. I experienced loss of sensation to my bladder following the procedure which was not picked up or explained to me until some days later when I expressed concern about the volume of urine I was passing - despite this being noted while I was in hospital.

I continue to have loss of sensation to my lower abdomen around the surgical wound

I also experienced significant distress with the delay to breastfeeding and the jaundice that my baby experienced as a result.

My ability to have further children has been impacted by an increased pregnancy interval required due to having a caesarean.

Mine and my families daily function and enjoyment of our new baby was impacted by the recovery from major abdominal surgery.