

Submission
No 686

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my daughter in April, 2019 at _____ Hospital. I was classed as high-risk by my OB as I had a miscarriage end of 2017 which led me down a path of many tests and investigations with a Gynecologist to finally work out I have a uterus abnormality, specifically a Septate Uterus. There were complications in falling pregnant yet again and carrying the pregnancy with a raft of possible complications along the way. Some of which included a ruptured placenta, higher rates of miscarriage, pre-term delivery and a list of others and I was required to be off work from 32 weeks. To say I was anxious and nervous the entire pregnancy is an understatement. In the end, my beautiful baby girl was safe & healthy after 40 weeks, but not without a very traumatic delivery - namely many, many mistakes that could and should have been avoided if the care I received during delivery was properly carried out.

I was booked in and arrived at 3pm to which a few basic introductions took place and was told the cervix gel would be applied. Several hours passed by and I was in excruciating pain - I was unable to sit, simply pacing the maternity ward small room I was in. Even though I was booked in, I was told the labouring rooms were at capacity. It felt from the very get go, I wasn't being listened to. I had a fall at home in 2016 which resulted in ongoing pain of my coccyx/tailbone. I had every single X-ray, ultrasound, MRI, physio, chiro, osteo and more over the years and the pain I experienced in the first few hours of being in labour was excruciating to say the least - we believe in hindsight it was bub pressing on my inverted tailbone (not contractions as told by my OB and hospital staff). This was a very real concern for me going into birth on how my body would cope with this injury that wasn't addressed on several occasions.

Unsure even to this day as to why, I asked for pain relief but was told by hospital nurses that they were unable to give me anything at the request of my OB. I also requested my discharged papers that detailed my birth, pain relief etc and the response why "was would you want that?".

Many hours passed and it was close to 11pm when finally an Anesthetist was called in apparently as they had finished for the day (again, an under resourced/poorly managed system). Finally I was ready to get an Epidural around 12.30am. After all the required prep was done, within minutes it fell out and I remember the nurse who assisted looked at me and said "Oops that's never happened before". So a second attempt by the Anesthetist to do an epidural was finally successful.

Close to 2am and I was finally moved into a birthing suite that had become available. With very little pain relief, I was exhausted, both physically and mentally. The pain from my coccyx was unbearable and nothing could be given to me as I was told my OB decided against it again with no justification as to why. Gas was useless. All this time, my husband kept saying to me this is bad, we should have birthed in the public hospital. He also saw that I wasn't being heard or listened to.

Hours passed and nurses came and went. One nurse finally came into my room and said that baby's heartrate was very low for hours now and they couldn't work out why. She then saw that my IV drip fluid in my arm wasn't connected properly so had to organise a quicker and stronger drip of fluids to put fluids into my body for myself and baby from the past 6+ hours that the drip had not been working. I was gobsmacked to say the least. Both my body, myself and the baby had been in distress all this time. This was the moment I realised things were constantly going downhill and simple mistakes were being made that shouldn't have. In all my exhaustion and no medical background, I then quickly realised at this point that I had to question things and really be on top of things moving forward..

6am the next day and I hadn't seen or heard from my OB but I was told by the nurse that things were progressing too slow (not sure if my uterus abnormality was causing this or due to what happened the hours since being in labour?) and that an Emergency Cesarean would be done shortly. Wheeled down into the prep room prior to surgery and it wasn't until they were about to wheel me in that I said I can feel my thighs, am I meant to? Both theatre nurses were shocked and said no, you definately shouldn't be able to. Here I was about to be cut open and organs re-arranged. So they had to quickly arrange for a spinal block. Again, they don't know if the second attempt at an Epidural failed or the doses given....no answers to this day on what actually happened.

After the successful spinal block and a pin prick test (which should have been done prior to the spinal block to alert them to the fact I could actually feel my legs), I was wheeled into the room. The procedure went well & my healthy baby girl was born.

When wheeled into recovery, I remember struggling to breathe. I couldn't feel any part of my body other than my left arm where my drip was inserted and able to barely hold my daughter on my chest. I was later told the spinal block was done too far up and had partially blocked my lungs, hence the struggle to breathe.

After the trauma of birth, I remember my OB coming into my room and questioned all of this to which there was very little answers or empathy given what I had just been through. I will forever remember the brief conversation we had and his reply.. "unfortunately due to no fault of your own, your body is not meant to give birth naturally. Next time, we will book you in for a Cesarean." I remember feeling numb, shock, gobsmacked and confused. With my uterus abnormality after months of searching for a high-risk OB and being told everything will be fine and there is no reason why you can't give birth naturally to be told that the day after delivery was infuriating.

It was a few days later close to discharge day and I was not mentally ready to go home. I think still processing the shock of what had happened and answers I didn't have. I asked the nurses if I could stay one more day just to myself and bub and requested no visitors - the reply was no, the ward is full. On discharge day, we walked the corridors and there was room after

room empty, door open. Why wasn't I allowed to stay 1 day at my request? Mentally I was not in a good place.

After being discharged, I knew something wasn't right after being at home for a few days and several doctors appointments. I couldn't sit, even on a soft lounge or laying in bed & sleeping was excruciating. I hadn't opened my bowels since my Cesarean and the medications prescribed by my GP in hindsight were apparently making me more constipated. I ended up back in hospital a few days later to have a suppository that worked.

Finally home and two months went by. I had trouble breastfeeding since day one where I felt immense pressure by the nurses and lactation consultants that "breast is best". The pressure to breastfeed only was immense. As soon as I was wheeled into recovery, I had been told nipple shields were needed and a few months later after having feeding issues, bub losing weight constantly was told the nipple shields were not the right shape or size and that was causing the poor latch, bub to become exhausted after inhaling too much air and therefore getting very little milk.

It was the June long weekend of 2019 and it was one exhausting week of visiting three GPs, family clinics, Physiotherapists and medications that I was in serious pain. Mastitis had developed quickly. I had very little sleep or energy on top of the usual sleep deprivation of being a first time mum. I remember sobbing in the shower, I could barely hold my daughter. I had temps over 39, shivering and shaking. After calling 000 around 4am that morning and being told they couldn't assist despite my symptoms, I had to leave my 3mth old newborn with my sisters and my husband drove me to ED. I was finally admitted, then transferred back over to the hospital where I gave birth. Third time back in at the same hospital.

Put simply, I was told I had a serious infection that had spread to my lymphnodes under my arms. Once antibiotics had controlled the infection, the mastitis and how to decrease my milk supply was the next issue. For 1 week spent alone from my daughter, the nurses repeatedly asked me to try to feed her as it would be best to empty my left breast. It was excruciating and didn't work despite my response that I didn't want to. My milk was full of blood. I had a total of 7-9 ultrasounds and aspirations where they number my breast and extracted milk through needles. There are still scars on my left breast to this day. The problem was that every time they extracted milk, my breast automatically filled back up so we were going around in circles. Between the consulting Dr, an OB, lactation consultant at the hospital, nurses and consultation with the nurses as the _____, they simply did not know what to do and were saying "let's try this, let's try that." It felt like I was an experimental human alone in a room, in a ward amongst mothers that had given birth, with my daughter away from me during this whole time.

After being discharged despite my repeated requests that this was not solved, it was months and months that I had to sort this out myself. It was October (3mths later) and after countless GP visits, follow up ultrasounds and a visit to a breast surgeon that wanted to put a drain into

my breast that would have worse consequences and a consultation to a breast specialist in Sydney, I was finally given the all clear. I went back to visit the nurse at the
to personally thank her and she also stated that she felt they simply "didn't know what to do with me or how to resolve the serious Mastitis" that I had.

I was due to return to work just 3months later and mentally I was not ready. I extended my leave by another 12 mths to spend time with my daughter to have that special bond and precious moments of being a first time mum that I believe were taken away from me, as well as heal from all the trauma experienced the past 12mths.

Four years on, it's affected our entire family. My husband has spoken very little of the trauma that he witnessed first hand. Also his wishes to have another child. I would be lying if I said I wasn't petrified of having another pregnancy, birth or experience even close to this.

I saw a counsellor several months after the birth which I initiated myself. The memories and scars will always be there from this traumatic experience. There was no support, offer of assistance or referrals offered at the time by the hospital, nurses or GPs despite the 3 admissions there and in hindsight I truthfully believe this would have changed my experience in the days, months and years following birth.

There were many unnecessary mistakes made by many health professionals in my birth experience and no woman, especially a first-time mum should have to have this as their birthing experience memory with them for life. It has changed me as a person, a mum, a wife and how I view the hospital birthing system.