

**Submission
No 687**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Miss Ashleigh Stephens

Date Received: 15 August 2023

Both of the following occurred in early 2023.

I experienced both ends of the spectrum as I was admitted to the major public hospital in my region for threatened preterm labour, discharged, and then subsequently delivered with an MGP at another hospital in the area.

Throughout my pregnancy, I was with a midwifery group practice that are part of a birthing centre in my area. I had one midwife throughout who ensured I was comfortable, confident, and provided me with all the information I needed to make decisions for myself and baby throughout the pregnancy. Everything was my decision; every medical test, ultrasound, physical exam - I was well-informed and allowed to take the reins as this was my pregnancy and my body. It was a truly empowering experience.

At 34 weeks I was sent to the major hospital for my region with symptoms of preterm labour; this meant I may not have been able to deliver with the MGP due to the high risk nature of preterm birth. When I arrived at the ward for assessment, I was hooked up to the CTG almost immediately, and then I was left hooked up to it for five hours. Midwives came in and out, sometimes with an obstetrician, to do internal exams. I expressed a history of sexual assault and that I needed delicate care and a smaller speculum to comfortably perform the exam. I was told that I just needed to breathe and it would be fine. The obstetricians and midwives had total disregard for my needs and when leaving the room, called me 'dramatic' while they left me having a PTSD episode. I was admitted after 13 continuous hours of monitoring on the CTG and told I had to stay alone - my partner was to leave and I could call him back if I did successfully deliver that night.

I was pushed to have constant mild pain relief to numb the pain of my 'braxton hicks' even though I expressed that the pain relief didn't work and that I didn't want it. The next day I was sent for an ultrasound (6 weeks later I was told that this ultrasound did show labour had begun, I was having genuine contractions and had begun to efface.) I was sent home, and readmitted myself 13 hours later with increasing symptoms. I was once again left alone in a room, connected to the CTG and unable to leave the bed, with no support person. I was pushed to take morphine to "stop the pain" and given no information on whether or not this was a safe option for myself and baby. The midwives finally allowed my partner on the floor to stay for the night, and the following morning no progress was made so I requested to go home. I was given no information that told me I should stay. I was simply told over and over again that I had intense braxton hicks. When I expressed my desire to leave I was told,

"If you leave, you're going to have this baby at home, quickly, and it will die."

I was terrified for my baby's wellbeing and immediately transferred to a ward. Once again, I was pushed to take pain relief repeatedly and then I went 12 hours without seeing a nurse,

midwife or doctor. I was left alone in a room and ignored. Eventually I went home because I felt unsafe and unheard in this space.

During my time on the L&D ward of this hospital, I overheard many conversations between doctors. They pushed each woman who came through to proceed with an induction, publicly chastised patients both to their faces and to other doctors for refusing epidurals, and criticised women who followed their instincts and wanted to birth away from the bed.

As a public hospital, they were more worried about convenience than they were the safety and well-being of birthing people and their babies. It was an eye opener and solidified my desire to never birth there.

My baby boy was delivered at 40+2 by my consistent midwife from the MGP in a calm and empowering birth. My birth plan was followed to the letter and I could not imagine having birthed any other way.