

Submission
No 688

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Jess Hipsley, I am 32 years old based in _____ and have a 2.5-year-old and a 17 month old.

Both my births were negative experiences for me. My care at the hands of obstetricians was absolutely abysmal and I have a resulting mistrust of the system. The way I was treated was a major factor in deciding to only have two children as I refuse to go through the experience again.

For my first birth in November 2020, I decided on a private obstetrician in a private hospital-throughout my pregnancy I reiterated that I had no intentions of interventions and wanted to birth as naturally as possible. This was supported throughout the pregnancy until 40 weeks. I was told by multiple medical practitioners throughout my pregnancy that I would not 'be allowed' to go past 40 weeks because I had used IVF to conceive. I had no access to birth awareness programs due to covid and believed my best interests were going to be supported with my private obstetrician.

At 40 weeks, I was induced because my baby was 'big', given no information on the risks, or impacts. At 4pm, I was given the gel to kick things off and left on my own for hours, not support or advice from midwives on how to encourage my body – just left isolated. I had the second dose of gel 6 hours later and it hyper stimulated me so I was having contractions at a minute on/minute off to no effect (baby wasn't low) right through the night, resulting in no rest. At 7am my obstetrician came in, performed an extremely painful cervical examination and told me the best option at this point was a c-section because if I continued 'like this', my baby could go into distress and die.

My obstetrician then booked in an 'emergency' caesarean for 5pm that afternoon after their day of appointments and left my crying in my room. Midwives offered no support, no options and one even told me she wasn't sure why I was upset, all her three children were delivered by caesarean section.

I was scared and not given options, nothing was explained and I had no idea what it meant to have the surgery or what the recovery would be. I had problems bonding and feeding my child and felt like a total failure throughout the entire experience. I was coerced and manipulated into decisions without an explanation of the risks.

I was completely traumatised by this experience and was horrified to find out I was pregnant with my second child when my first was only 7 months old – even though by some miracle we had conceived naturally.

Not wanting a repeat, I wanted to go through the public system but was convinced by my GP that private would be best due to covid outbreaks in the local public hospitals and all the risks

involved. I went with a different private OB, who informed me that I would get my 'vaginal birth after caesarean' if the stars aligned due to the 16-month age gap instead of the recommended 18 months. They outlined three criteria for a natural birth – baby not too big, no induction and no complications. I was told I wasn't high risk.

The pregnancy progressed as normal, and my choices were supported until 36 weeks. I was advised that because of the 16-month age gap I would not be offered induction and I should book a caesarean only. I declined, and was told that I was being unsafe, my child was sitting 'unsafely' in my womb as baby was not engaged in my pelvis at 36 weeks. When I declined to book in a c-section and insisted I wanted to try birth vaginally my obstetrician insisted that my husband be present at my next appointment where she told him I was being unsafe and my baby was in danger. When he asked for statistics on the risks he was told "there are no stats for her specific situation". I felt disrespected that the OB would call on my husband to try and pressure me also.

I was then told that due to me being at extremely high risk of cord prolapse even though there was no evidence of the cord being anywhere close to my cervix – the OB showed me it was out of the way. I was instructed to either book a c-section or present at the private hospital for daily monitoring for half an hour even though I said it would be hard to do because I had a 7 month old. Trying to keep the peace, I did go for monitoring. I was told by midwives there that my OB didn't want my labour to commence naturally, and I was denied access to antenatal expressing kits when I requested. My obstetrician said the midwives would call her and she would not give approval. I was bullied, manipulated, and lied to throughout the last few weeks of my pregnancy, and treated very disrespectfully.

Feeling completely unsafe, I transferred out of the OBs care at 40 weeks. I got in contact with a VBAC specialist in _____ Hospital and went for assessment there. I was told baby was fine and that a VBAC was possible. I opted to even drive to Sydney to have my baby as I didn't want to present at _____ Hospital in labour and have the chance of the private OB being on call there that day. The transfer meant I lost the 'pregnancy management fee' of \$4000 as it was after 20 weeks.

I transferred into the care of the OB in Sydney. In a follow up appointment at 41 weeks an alternate OB who introduced themselves as a 'Senior Obstetrician' took my file to assist my Dr, who had a large delay that day, by doing the preliminary checks. I agreed to the triage type process and within 2 mins of being in their presence- I was told that I should have c-section immediately, only due to the 16-month gap, they checked and told me baby was completely fine, no more risk of cord prolapse than normal. After declining another c-section and feeling harassed. I was told to schedule my 42 week 'routine ultrasound' and that Dr signed the forms of the ultrasound booking forms even though they weren't my OB.

At 42 weeks I did the ultrasound and was discussing with the VBAC OB about inducing labour with the Foley balloon due to being over 42 weeks at this point. The 'Senior Obstetrician'

burst into the room and said they needed to speak to my VBAC OB immediately and advised that according to my ultrasound photos, my surgery scar looked abnormal, and I was advised I wouldn't be allowed to leave the hospital and I would not be allowed to have the balloon induction. A c-section was my only option.

Although I felt fine and told them so, given a burst scar would obviously be painful. I was talked into surgery due to again, the potential of my baby dying - and advised I would be having my baby within 2 hours. While on the operating table, after fighting for months to have my baby on my terms and feeling like I was being let down – the obstetrician said to their colleague to the effect of “oh the scar is fine, doesn't look bad at all”. I almost broke down then. I felt completely powerless.

When I asked them about it, they said they would come and debrief with me and to focus on baby for now. They never did come to see me, and didn't respond to my calls or emails in the weeks after the birth. That surgery was reported as an 'elective caesarean' even though I was told I couldn't leave the hospital that day and my baby was in danger.

I ended up out of pocket for an entirely pregnancy worth of consultations and the pregnancy management fee for the private obstetrician, ended up with another unwanted surgery and recovery, was completely bullied and lied to throughout my pregnancy by multiple OBs. When I went to my GP to get a referral for counselling after two traumatic births I was told “I don't get it, you got two children – isn't that the point?!” and the GP also said that they wouldn't be surprised if I had been 'duped' into another caesarean and that the notes sent by the Obs to the GP told a very different story to what told her.

I have worked through trauma counselling for my births in the hopes of not crying when I try to fill out my children's baby books.

The state of the care model given to birthing people is abhorrent and the trauma I experienced was terrible, I was treated with disrespect, my feelings and wishes were disregarded in favour of hospital policy and I was told repeatedly that I would kill my child if I didn't agree to the course of action.

I believe that the model needs to change substantially, Obstetricians should not be a primary care provider for pregnant women. There should be no financial incentives for private obstetricians to perform c-sections for the surgery fee - there should be only one delivery fee regardless of method of birth. Obstetricians should have to account for high caesarean rates, and the reporting of these events quality assured. I feel that there should be more ability for women to access their records and ensure the accuracy in their medical records as mine were blatantly incorrectly recorded.

The rigidity of hospital policy around recommended guidelines is harmful to women and the 'risk' culture means that you have to fight to let a natural process run its course naturally. I have high hopes that the experiences shared in this inquiry will see widespread changes to how women are treated, and that obstetric violence will be challenged at every level and ended. Thank you for your time.