

**Submission  
No 692**

## **INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA**

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I had a complex pregnancy and was told to expect a preterm birth. I did a lot of research prior to my birth to find out what I could expect with a preterm birth and a likely c section. That said, when it was decided at 32+2 that my baby would be safer coming out via emergency cesarean, everything moved very quickly and there was not the time to communicate plans and desires as I had anticipated. I tried to talk to my midwife on ward but she told me there would be a different midwife in theatre with me and I should ask her.

I was told on the day of my operation that there was a high chance I would need a classical cesarean which would mean I could never attempt a vbac. This was a big shock to me and added fear. During the entire procedure no one told me what type I was having and it wasn't until much later that I was told a cross section was able to be performed.

I knew that it was likely that my baby would need to be taken from me very quickly at 32 weeks gestation but I expected that when I arrived at the theatre someone would introduce themselves and explain who was going to be looking after me and who was going to be looking after my baby. There was a large room of people and no one told me this information.

My operation was on a Saturday. At the beginning of the operation the surgeons were discussing their weekend plans and what they were doing in the morning when they were called in to perform this emergency caesarean. My partner tried to distract me by talking to me but it was such an emotional day, so much fear already about the health of our baby, and to hear doctors essentially complaining about being called into work to deliver my baby was really stressful.

When my baby was finally delivered my memory is of the doctor holding him up in front of me, above my belly, and someone a few meters away counting down loudly. No one had told me what the count was about but I knew the baby would be taken when that time got to zero. Initially I thought there was delayed umbilical chord clamping and that's why they were counting down but I found out later the cord was cut almost immediately. I didn't understand why they couldn't have brought him closer to me for that 20 seconds, no one went through who was taking him. My partner went with the baby which I knew to expect and left my phone in my hand. I asked for photos and updates as often as possible. Once they had left I could feel my phone vibrating in my outstretched arm but didn't know if I was allowed to move it. I felt pinned out in the bed and I kept trying to catch someone's eye to ask them about the baby or if someone could check my phone but no one spoke to me or checked on me.

In recovery I was left alone. I was violently shaking post surgery. I tried to look at my phone and text but it was very challenging. I had to ask if I could be taken to my baby and was told I had to go up to ward first. I knew there were stories of people being taken straight from recovery to their babies and in the weeks that followed when I was visiting my baby in the NICU I saw other mothers taken to their babies. I wasn't allowed.

Once in the postnatal ward I asked again and they called the special care unit and told me there was no room for my bed and I could have to wait until I could walk before visiting my baby. A minimum of 6 hours. I asked regularly as I started to get feeling in my legs and was told no not yet.

Finally at 6:30pm (the operation was at midday) I was wheeled down in a wheelchair to the NICU to see my baby. I wasn't allowed to hold him and my memory was that I was discouraged from touching him for too long. I missed his first poo, his first nappy change, his first bit of expressed colostrum. I was taught how hand express and use a pump and started my 3 hourly expressing schedule which I did in my ward room away from my baby. It was very unnatural. I didn't get to hold my baby until 10am the next day due to the care schedule 4am, 10am, 4pm, 10pm. I did not feel any described oxytocin rush and it took me a long time to feel connected and bonded. I felt happy to care for my baby and didn't want to be apart from him, but I felt robbed of so many crucial bonding experiences in my first hours after delivery.

The things I think should have been different include:

- clear introductions of who my care team were, who was taking care of my baby, which was taking care of me
- a designated staff member to ask me if I had questions and explain possible scenarios
- someone checking on me and giving me updates on the baby
- access to see my baby as soon as I left recovery
- skin to skin with my baby as soon as possible.
- privacy screens offer straight away to express with my baby beside me.
- information about a place to debrief my birth and NICU experience if/when I needed it in the future. At this time I have not found anything offered like this.