

Submission
No 700

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My first pregnancy and birth I trusted, trusted my care providers to care for me, better than what I could care for myself. My husband and I took all the classes available at my local hospital (at the time it was [REDACTED]). The midwife running the class was great, but the class itself only prepared us for the hospital's protocol. We learnt that induction often led to a cascade of intervention, and learnt that intervention often led to unwanted birth outcomes. I was on the general midwifery care, so I didn't get the chance to build a relationship of trust with one or two midwives. At 40 weeks I had to have an appointment with an OB, because I was now overdue, even though all birth professionals know the standard pregnancy lasts anywhere between 37-42 weeks, safely, without risk to mother or baby.

The OB asked me to get on the bed without my underwear to have a look what was going on, I complied, I was on my own first time mum as a 23 year old, I trusted. But before I knew it the OB had inserted 2 fingers inside my vagina, and declared "I'm going to sweep you to get your cervix working", it hurt so much, I said so and my body language tensed up as I was touched and probed from the inside without warning or consent given. I left the appointment crying, not only because of what just happened, but because I was told my body wasn't working, felt as though I'd already failed my child by not birthing before my due date. I was in so much physical and emotional pain. I bled that evening, but was too scared to tell the hospital.

When my labour did start a few days later I panicked, I didn't want to go to the hospital, I didn't trust them to care for me, I could feel my body in flight or fight mode, I was terrified of the birth, terrified my body wasn't capable of birthing my baby, just as the OB made me feel. I never relaxed during the birth. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't focus, so I took gas to help ease the edge off, I was on gas for several hours before I was told I needed an emergency c-section. I said very loudly many times that "I can't" "I don't understand, my mind is too foggy", I asked multiple times for more time, but I was pushed a consent form in my face to sign agreeing to the c-section. The midwife said maybe on the way my baby will be born, to help me agree to the process, which looking back now is so condescending treating me like a child to get what they wanted me to do.

My child was born in the operating room, and I was so stunned by what had just happened to me during the birth. Here I had a perfect baby, but I was a traumatised mess, for months and months. The OB who performed the sweep on me came into my recovery room demanding I do a bowel movement, as I hadn't done one for 24 hours since birth, she wanted me to take a suppository, but the midwife in the room told her it wasn't necessary as it was still early. The midwife had to teach the OB what was normal practice after birth, sure I'm sure this happens lots, but the fact the OB was so pushy and insistent made it so much worse. I really hope this OB learns to treat women in birth and pregnancy like people, and not just problems to be solved and dealt with.

I have since gone on to have 2 births out of hospital, which have been so very very healing, I know now I cannot trust care providers to have my best interests at heart, or my children's.