

Submission  
No 702

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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**Date Received:** 15 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

I gave birth in Feb, 2020 at                      Once reaching 40 weeks I was told that I would need to book induction. There was no issues with my pregnancy or overall health of myself or baby at this point. At 41 weeks I was told my risk of still birth will double if I don't get induced at 41+3 weeks, I was not told the actual numbers to be able to understand the real risk. I was also told that I would be going against medical advice if I didn't get induced at 41+3 weeks and that I would need to sign against medical advice. As a first time parent, without much knowledge of birth and normal time frames for spontaneous labour, I felt pressured to agree to the induction. I had my waters broken by a midwife, who I met that morning. I tried to build trust with her, and she seemed to be supportive of my desire for a natural and medication free birth. However, her shift finished only 2 hours after I had met her and my contractions had started from the syntocinon drip.

I would have loved to continue to have laboured with her. In fact, ideally, I would have had continuity of care from a midwife during my pregnancy to birth and postpartum. Instead, every appointment was someone different, some midwives extremely thorough and able to feel safe and comfortable with them in the short appointment time, others felt rushed and transactional. Back to my labour, I opted for the epidural after 2hrs of my contractions as the pain and intensity of contractions while receiving synthetic oxytocin was exhausting. When it came to pushing I was unable to feel contractions come and go and had a very difficult time knowing when to push, I didn't feel strong. I didn't feel like I could give birth to my baby any more. I doubted myself at a time when I needed to feel strong. Things had been done to me that I wish I hadn't be forced to do.

My babies heart rate increased and an obstetrician came into the room. She performed an episiotomy without informing me or asking for my consent. It was after birth that my husband told me he heard them cutting me open. That's how I found out. I was devastated and still am that I was not involved in this process. When bub was born he was checked by the paed immediately. His temp was higher than usual and he needed a little bit of support with breathing. The paed was unsure if nicu was required. We requested to have skin to skin and he agreed. My baby did the breast crawl and feed soon after being skin to skin. I wish I could have had skin to skin in those first 20mins of his life. He likely would have recovered the same way had he been close to me. I believe being in the hospital environment meant that more interventions were performed on both myself and my baby that were not necessary. We had no further complications, apart from leaving the hospital feeling that the hospital environment and decisions made by staff or forced on us, were not in our best interests, but following hospital policy and minimising risks for the medical staff, not for mum and baby.

Fast forward to earlier in the year, March 2023 and I am grateful to have a healing second birth in the comfort of my own home. I did a lot of independent research before falling pregnant. The birth time documentary really helped me to reimagine what my second birth could look like. As soon as I found out I was expecting, I called the local Midwifery group practice and reached out to a few doulas to support me during my birth. At 12 weeks I was offered a position in the MGP which would give me continuity of care with the same midwife throughout my pregnancy. Initially I was matched with a midwife who didn't feel like the right fit.

I was able to request a change from the manager and I was allocated another midwife who was fantastic. She came to our home for many of the appointments and I was able to develop trust with her and she got to know us, our family and our birth wishes during pregnancy. We also met with many other midwives in the MGP incase she was not available during the time of our birth. Unfortunately I had heard of other mums being turned away from the MGP due to strict policy around certain health conditions, which seemed unfair and unreasonable. These mums deserved continuity of care as well. For this reason, I decided to decline the glucose test and to mitigate any potential risk, I ate mostly a diabetic diet incase. I did this because if I was picked up to have GD I would lose my position in the MGP and the opportunity to birth at home, which I valued so greatly. My baby arrived at 41+6 days. I had great support on the phone in the lead up to my birth, from multiple midwives.

My midwife was unwell however she was still checking in on me on her sick days off. I had two amazing midwives arrive at our house, only in the last 20mins of my labour. I felt empowered and strong, supported by my doula and husband in the comfort of my home. In between contractions I turned to my doula and said 'I hope for every woman to be able to feel birth this way'. It was phenomenal. While one birth story brings me to tears from sadness and the loss of what could have been, my second birth story brings me tears of joy and peace. Unfortunately it wasn't all perfect, the policy with the MGP is that you must birth your placenta within an hour of birthing your baby at home or else you will be transferred to hospital for a managed placental birth. The midwives were pushy to get the placenta out. Only 15mins after birthing my baby, I was moved from the shower (where baby was born) to the couch, and then to the toilet to try to push the placenta out.

This was very uncomfortable. I just wanted to lie down and observe my baby, and encourage the breast crawl. I understand my midwives wanted to preserve the homebirth by encouraging the placenta to be pushed out quickly and they were trying to prevent a transfer to hospital. But this was not helpful for me in my first hour, the golden hour. My doula reminded me of the time, it's only been 20mins Sarah, she said to me. I remembered that I had time and to not stress out. My doula advocated for me at a time when I needed support and I was not able to think clearly. Thankfully my placenta came out at the 35 min mark and we were able to blissfully enjoy the time together as a new family of 4. Woman should not have to decline medical testing, such as the GD test, to be able to have access to continuity of care during pregnancy birth and post partum.

We should not need to have a first traumatic birth to then learn from that experience and be able to advocate for ourselves with the second birth. We should not have to pay for a private Doula to feel comfortable and supported, because we know the system is not in our favour to have a natural, medicated free birth. I will hold close to my heart my natural homebirth, under the running waters of our shower. An amazing start to my relationship with my daughter. I truly believe we can change the world, the relationships between parents and their children, by better supporting woman to give birth to their babies in an empowered, informed and supportive environment. I unfortunately know too many woman who have experienced birth trauma, almost everyone I speak to. Many of them the trauma is too big to be able to right a submission to this inquiry.

I share my story in the hope of a better future in maternity care in nsw and Australia. For the mums-to-be and for our children and grandchildren.