

Submission
No 863

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this email in response to the recent inquiry into birth related trauma. Whilst my submission is past the deadline I do still wish to send my story through.

The inquiry was actually sent to me by my most recent midwife from the birth of my 3rd child who helped me work through a lot of the trauma I had from my second birth.

1. In 2019 I began attending appointments for my second pregnancy overall & also my second pregnancy at hospital, NSW. This time round I had GDM & this meant I was to attend more appointments than I had when I didn't have gestational diabetes & would be subject to more, in terms of quantity & range, tests. Overall I had a few interactions that felt very generalised & biased, based solely off my age (22) and my cultural background. Ironically however my cultural background was mentioned selectively & at times, conveniently. As someone with Pacific Islander heritage, carrying & birthing baby's who would have more of this heritage than I do myself, it felt at times that the possibility of being Samoan & what that may mean in terms of physically compared to the 'average' used for most measurements, was disregarded. I was constantly told about the 'risk' of having a big baby & how dangerous it could be for myself & made to feel as if I was personally responsible for the size and rate my baby was growing. Attending ultrasound appointments & being told at almost every instance that the chances of my baby being in the higher percentile would increase the chances of c section, intervention, induction etc.

While there is an element of truth to these statements, they were presented with no contrasting statements. Told in a way that was mostly negative & with no discussion on the range of possibilities including the positive, more successful ones.

Everything mentioned above was in no way traumatic. A lot of it just a reminder at the issues that face a multicultural community made up of a collection of cultures with different experiences, expectations & different physical forms when being addressed by services that overall do not take many cultural considerations. However, it does help with the context of the situation that was traumatic.

Since my first baby was over 9 pounds (39 weeks 5 days), there was an expectation that this baby would follow suit even more so with the added factor of the GDM. This led to an induction being booked as scans had also seemed to prove there was a big baby coming. I'd been booked in on the 19th of May to be induced with the tape, 6 days ahead of my due date. The process was explained so I knew that once the tape was inserted/applied I was to remain in the maternity ward until active labour had been established. I was instructed to be careful when going to the toilet and to avoid excessive wiping as it may disturb the tape & ruin the process (essentially). While most of my memory is still quite clear, for obvious reasons my terminology may not be precise as I'm basing this off either what I was told or felt.

Around 10am the tape was inserted and by 4pm nothing had happened, at all. My parents brought my son to visit and around 7pm I went to the bathroom & as I sat down the tape fell out. I immediately went to the midwife on duty and told her what had happened and she responded saying I must have wiped too hard, when I hadn't even wiped at the point of it falling out. She then sent me to my room, admonishing me as if I was a naughty child while she tried to find whoever could begin the process again. I was told there was no way the tape could've been put in wrong & that it must've been something I did. This made me feel small and idiotic as I definitely tried my hardest to follow the instructions given not only because I generally comply with instructions but also because I was eager to begin the labour process & get one step closer to meeting my baby. As I was not in labour & it was close to visiting hours ending, my partner had to leave and could only return once labour had been established and I'd been moved up to the birthing suites. I said

goodbye to him, slightly anxious about being alone and possibly in labour until he gets there & also because I was prolonging the time away from my son who id never spent so much time away from. Once in my room I began to notice stirrings going on & noted to myself that the tape must be working

This time because earlier in the day, I'd had no such feelings.

Although the specific times aren't clear I do know that my partner had left before 8pm and between 12-1230am he had messaged me to check in as my son had woken up next to him & while settling him he grabbed his phone to check the time.

One thing I do know is that things progressed quite quickly once my mum left at 10pm.

Within the hour I was unable to sit down comfortably, feeling like something was between my legs. I also couldn't concentrate on the movie I had been trying to watch on my laptop & felt myself becoming more & more overwhelmed, wanting to be away from any screens/devices but also unsure of what exactly I was feeling.

Noticing that something was definitely starting I'd asked the midwife on duty to possibly check to see if I'd started dilating at all as I wanted to be on top of things to ensure I had time to call my partner when I moved upstairs and for him to be here.

Unfortunately this did not happen. I was told that I wasn't in enough pain to be in established enough labour to warrant any checking to be done. I was told to keep walking if I wanted to get things moving.

One thing that for lack of a better word, sucked, about not being in a room equipped for birthing and the lead up was that there wasn't really anything around to help me mentally or physically prepare. I was alone, with increasing pains & not feeling heard or seen with nothing to even physically rely on. I'd found an exercise ball to be very helpful previously and had mentally prepared to use that in labour especially when it became too uncomfortable to sit down.

Within the next 30 mins the pains were definitely ramping up & id mostly abandoned my phone, too focused on breathing through the pain to worry about keeping anyone up to date. I'd also been assured by the midwife that nothing would be happening this quick, especially since I'd been here all day with minimal progress, so there was plenty of time.

I began pacing the hallway outside my room alone, holding on to the wall to breathe through contractions & keep

Me standing. I did this in front of the desk the midwives were stationed at as I'd been told multiple times by now that they weren't going to be checking me yet.

Upon seeing me do this process of walking, pausing, breathing and clenching my eyes shut, the younger midwife who had so far been silent said to the other midwife that maybe it was time to check me. The other midwife said something along the lines of okay fine, soon.

The younger midwife told me they'd check me soon and asked what can she do in the meantime. I asked for a exercise ball & she said she'd see what she could do. I'm unsure of the time frame but she managed to get one and carried into my room with me walking behind her. She was in the middle of asking me if I knew how to use it when the other midwife went ahead of us with the monitor trailing beside her and told me to take my shorts off and jump on the bed. I was at the doorway and held on as I felt the strongest wave so far and I said loudly 'oh I need to push' the midwife looked shocked and on another wave I said the same

Thing. She said to quickly get on the bed so I did and they both looked between my legs and the younger midwife said 'it's time to call dad the baby is coming!'. They could see her head and with less than 5 pushes in about 10/15 minutes I gave birth to my daughter in the maternity ward, without her father or anyone there for me. I actually pushed as I was on the phone calling her dad after the midwife put

My passcode into my phone for me as I was literally in labour, giving birth and having to get my phone, find his contact and call him.

I'm not sure how or why it happened but before my daughter was fully out I was surrounded by different staff in different coloured scrubs. Once she was born, I cut her cord & thus began the

afterbirth process. I was extremely overwhelmed, in pain, exhausted and more so this process was not as effortless as birthing her. They needed to get a flashlight out, Tong looking things & hold my legs up to try get the placenta out. It ended up coming in fragments & I needed to go to theatre for a d&c.

While the obvious physical aspects of this birth can definitely be attributed to the trauma I felt, it does not come close to the feeling of being disregarded & disrespected. To feel that my pleas ,my literal cries for help , were being ignored & for this ignorance to then rob me of

- birthing in a room equipped for birth
- Having any support during labour
- Having MY specific support team by my side
- Having my daughters father present to see his daughter enter the world
- Having anyone there to advocate for myself, especially as it became more & more of a physical challenge to do so

is one of the hardest things to reconcile with. I blamed myself for so long for not being more vocal, not being more succinct with what I was feeling. I felt to blame that my partner missed his daughters birth when it was avoidable. I felt like I brought this all upon myself.

This impacted not only my self worth & relationship I had with myself but also heavily impacted my ability & capacity to bond with my child. I found it a chore at times to tend to her as I was still feeling like so much had happened without anything actually being addressed or resolved. I really had to be very conscious about working on my mental health after this & only began to be able to tell this birth story without crying by her 2nd birthday.

As someone who is quite outspoken & an advocate for those unable to speak for themselves, it also made me rethink who I was as a person since in my opinion I had inflicted this situation upon myself by not advocating for myself. Cue the imposter syndrome & all of the fun times that comes with.

Overall, it was a challenging time in my life that impacted me in more ways than I'd realised at the time. Even if my submission isn't added, I give permission and do hope it's read by someone who can use any part of it, to do something to help minimise the chances of anything close to my experience being repeated.

There is more I'm happy to share along with answering any questions via email or phone on

Thank you for your time

Lani Perez

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