

Submission
No 869

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Hello. This is my traumatic birth story.

I found out I was pregnant with my first baby on the 4th of January 2018. It was an exciting start to the new year for us. Our first baby was on the way. We decided to go through hospital care and, knowing I was high risk for diabetes I got the test done early at 14 weeks. Nobody at the hospital contacted me to let me know I came back positive for gestational diabetes. I had to chase it myself at my 16 week appointment at public hospital. From that time on I was regularly reminded that my options for birth were limited. I had to be induced early and because of the diabetes and need for monitoring I would not be allowed the active birth I wanted. I wanted to be in the bath or the shower but that was not allowed. I wanted to be able to move about freely, but that was difficult because of all the machines. I asked for the wireless monitors, but there wasn't a guarantee I'd get them.

At my 34 week scan they became concerned about baby's size. "Come back in a week and we'll check the flow in the cord, then a week later again to check size."

From that point on everything was out of my control. The cord seemed fine, but baby still small. Baby has grown, but now your fluids are dangerously low. I went from a scan to an obstetrician within minutes. From there the trauma starts. I still remember her face, though her name escapes me. She told me "right, you're having baby next week."

I was shocked. I thought 38 or 39 week induction, not 37. I asked her why? And in the most blaise and callous way she said "well you don't want a stillborn do you?"

I burst into tears. I was terrified. She seemed to realise just how lacking her bedside manner was. She attempted to reassure me by saying "it's ok, we aren't that worried, otherwise we'd be admitting you and not letting you go home. You just have to come in for monitoring every other day until induction next week." This did little to quell my turmoil. I was made to feel like a failure. That I had let my baby down. I went into robot mode. Going through everything they said in a state of shock. I was still working too, so I finished up the next day and tried to prepare as best as I could for the next week. Induction process was long. I was deemed too high a risk so I couldn't go home for early labour. I was uncomfortable, scared and confused. My husband was a beacon of strength, but I could see the fear in his eyes too. The midwives were reassuring but they weren't familiar with what was happening in my unique case, as their workloads are so large as is.

There was no room in the antenatal ward, so I was in the post natal ward. Hearing babies crying all the time, whilst being terrified mine wouldn't. The first 24 hours not much happened so a second round of cervadil was applied. After 8 hours with the second one my waters broke. And they were bright pink.... "oh that's ok" said one midwife dismissively. I kept asking when we would go to the birth unit as I had tested positive to the bacteria that required antibiotics for at least 4 hours. "When there's room"

I was just another number. Just another person to push out the door.

At 11pm they finally said we can take you down. I was already exhausted. They started the drip and I could not labour at all how I wanted. I asked for the wireless monitors. "You can't have those in this room"

Not once until that point was I told they were only for a specific room. If I had known maybe I would have pushed for that room.

So I laboured, instead, stuck to the bed. Exhausted. Emotional. Terrified.

They couldn't get a proper read of baby's heart rate, so they applied the one that goes on the head.

After 3 hours I was so exhausted. I needed the epidural. After that I slept. But at my 6am check I was feeling pain again. The midwife said it was rare, given how undilated I was a few hours ago, but perhaps baby has moved into the birth canal. She checked, and the head was right there. "Ok you're going to start pushing. But I can't stay for your baby's birth. Someone else will take over." I was left again feeling like just another number. I know they have their own lives and commitments and she honestly thought I'd be there for hours still labouring. But I was shoved off to someone else once again. At that point I just wanted my baby safe and pushed it away from my mind.

The new midwives came in and started my care. They encouraged me to push, but nobody switched off my epidural. I couldn't feel anything. And I was still exhausted. Hard as I might, I could not push my baby out. A short time later they mentioned baby's heart rate wasn't coming back up quick enough between contractions. They had to call the doctors in. A team of them swarmed in. The terror on my face was evident. The midwives tried to reassure me "They just want to hear baby scream"

All I could do at that point was try not to dissolve into a puddle of tears and fear. The doctor sat down in front of me, muttered things to her colleague. Looked at me and said "I'm doing an episiotomy" then said "I'm giving you 5 minutes, if this baby isn't on you chest by then, I'm putting it there"

I couldn't do it. I tried so hard to push but I couldn't do it. So they got the suction out and finally my baby girl was born. She was crying, she was pink, she was alive. I was so relieved. I had a flood of tears, as did my husband. We had our baby, in our arms. She was seemingly ok. Most of the doctors left. One stayed to stitch me up, the other for the apgar. She scored a 9, so the doctor left. We did her first sugars, she passed so we felt like we were in the clear.

Her second sugars were low. I gave her formula to help stabilise. The glucose syrup to help bring it up. Nothing worked. We had to go to special care and put her on a drip for 24 hours.

Seeing our baby wired up like that was so difficult. Most of the midwives were lovely, bar 1. She got a piece of my mind and after that changed her tune. There was no need for her rudeness when families are already on the brink. After just over 24 hours her sugars were stable and she moved back to the ward with me. 36 hours after that we went home.

I was still in shock from it all and just wanted to forget and get on with our new life. I didn't yet realise I'd been traumatised.

We had 1 visit from the midwife at home program. She came, did her check on our daughter and looked about the house. "Oh you've done a load of washing already"

"Yeah we needed clean clothes"

"Oh you'll be fine if you're already washing. No need to be seen by us again."

I was once again dismissed and rushed out the door. I didn't know this wasn't normal. I didn't know we'd been failed by the system once again.

I am grateful that my daughter is fine. And is a thriving almost 5 year old now. But the month of August is always so hard. It takes a toll on me each year. To think what I could've lost. To remember what we went through.

Last year, I had my second baby. I never thought in the past I would have as large a gap as we ended up having. I know now that is because of the trauma I experienced. I was too scared to go through it again.

But second time around I was armed with knowledge. I demanded a certain degree of care. And I let the hospital know how they had failed us last time. I'm happy to report my second birth was wonderful, and beautiful. I was able to birth as I wanted, and I had minimal intervention, other than needing induction again, but this time at 40 weeks.

What happened to me pales in comparison to the trauma of others. But it still was not ok. I don't want any other woman to be failed like that again. I hope this inquiry helps to rectify the number of failures that have happened through the system.

I thank you for your time.