

Submission
No 872

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Hi,

My name is _____, and I am a physiotherapist with a special interest in pelvic floor dysfunction and women's health.

I would like to make a submission regarding birth trauma in NSW Health.

I work in a regional area, at _____, for NSW Health. At this hospital, despite 1100 babies born per year, there is no dedicated funding for a Women's Health Physiotherapist. This means that women who experience birth trauma/ pelvic floor trauma (3rd and 4th degree perineal tears, levator ani avulsion, urinary and fecal incontinence, prolapse) do not have a dedicated trained WH physio who can assist them with their recovery. There is no Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury Clinic, so there is no co-ordinated care with colorectal / Ob/Gyn and WH physio. This is despite Australian Safety Commission Guidelines, RANZCOG guidelines, and NICE guidelines stating they should have access to a trained WH physio, and have co-ordinated care with Ob/Gyn/Colorectal and WH physio.

Currently, I am seeing some postnatal women for acute postnatal pelvic floor trauma, but I do not have funding to do this, so my hours are very limited and the service is adhoc. I have found that women who need follow up care with a colorectal surgeon for ongoing sphincter pain/ faecal incontinence / bleeding aren't able to get in to see a colorectal surgeon for months and months and need to pay for this consultation privately.

There is certainly a huge disparity between women who are having babies regionally and rurally and the care they receive, compared to women in cities. All women in the big city maternity hospitals have access to a WH physio antenatally and postnatally and have co-ordinated care with Ob/Gyn, colorectal and midwife/ WH physio.

Often, for women who have experienced postnatal pelvic floor trauma, the WH physio is the person they can turn to for advice, ongoing care, improvement in strength and mobility, and return to exercise and activity. Women who don't receive this care often don't know what they can do to improve their condition, they suffer from mental health problems, and are at risk of being a bigger burden on society due to incontinence issues as they age. Also, they do not return to exercise confidently, which can spiral into other health issues.

WH physiotherapy for antenatal and postnatal women should be part of primary health care throughout Australia – it is a tragedy that it is not.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission.

Kind regards

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