

**Submission
No 707**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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In 2005 I gave birth to my twins by way of an emergency c-section because one of my twins was severely compromised during birth and I was at genuine risk of losing her. In 2014 I gave birth to my stillborn son by way of a VBAC. In 2015 I gave birth to my youngest daughter by way of an “elective” c-section. What shocks most people is that my first two experiences were not traumatic, but my last birth was.

During the pregnancy of my twins I had continuity of care. During their birth, even in the midst of an emergency, I was treated with the utmost respect and care, I was given all the information needed to make informed decisions, I made choices and they were respected. The staff were incredible, and even though my babies had to be taken to the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) I was reunited with them very quickly and we had skin to skin and time to establish breastfeeding and a connection.

During the birth of my son, who I already knew had passed before his birth, I was again given all the information needed to make I for decisions, I made all the choices, and I was treated with respect and the utmost of care. His birth was heartbreaking, but it was not traumatic, and that was because of the incredible care I received.

My last birth... where do I even start. I was classed as high risk for many reasons, yet despite that my care was fragmented and disordered, my file was marked incorrectly and despite repeatedly advising the myriad of staff that I saw, it was never corrected. I was even told by one obstetrician that it was not ok to change the information on the file, even though it was incorrect and had a misdiagnosis on it and was causing repeated issues. I was given false information and grossly exaggerated facts in an attempt to coerce me to book a c-section. When I pointed out the fact that the information was incorrect and gave them accurate information from RANZCOG, Australian, and NSW guidelines, I was dismissed.

When I made safe and reasonable decisions based on facts I was treated with disrespect. I even had one Dr yell at me from a crowded waiting room in front of other pregnant women and my two older children “YOU ALREADY HAVE ONE DEAD BABY ON YOUR HANDS, DO YOU REALLY WANT ANOTHER!” as a midwife led me away and encouraged me to leave the hospital because of the treatment I was receiving.

My mental and emotional health declined as my pregnancy continued. The same Dr that yelled at me, also lied to me about test results in further efforts to coerce me into a repeat c-section. She also threatened that she would report me to Community Services and that my older children and my newborn baby would be removed from me if I didn’t do as I was told.

I refused to see that Dr again, but she would push her way into my consults and start lecturing and berating me.

It reached the point that I was riddled with anxiety in the lead up to each appointment. I was being seen multiple times a week and I made the mistake of going in every time thinking that if I just went in, had all the tests, and they saw that everything was ok, that they'd respect my decisions. This never happened.

They broke me down and I consented to the repeat c-section. It was one of the worst decisions of my life. I consented on the condition that the Dr that had yelled at me, threatened me, and lied to me about my test results would not be involved at all.

On the day of my surgery, after I had spoken with the Obstetrician that was to perform my c-section, had been given the spinal block and was unable to move, and was being prepped for the surgery to begin, the Dr that was supposed to not be anywhere near me came in and performed the surgery, despite my pleas for her to stop, for her to be removed, and despite the fact that I still had full feeling on one side of my body and could feel the pain of the incisions and the pulling, she violated my choices, my body, and my birth. My baby was supposed to be born and passed straight to me for skin to skin, her cord was not meant to be cut, and she was supposed to stay with me in recovery. All these things that were planned to happen with the Obstetrician were taken away from me as some form of sick punishment by this Dr. I was separated from my baby for over 5hrs, despite the staff in recovery continually calling and asking for me to be taken to the ward to see my baby.

After her birth the treatment from this Dr continued on the ward. A midwife had to call for a senior Obstetrician at one point and have her removed from my room as she was insisting on giving me medication that would have resulted in an adverse reaction. I ended up signing myself out of the hospital and leaving far too early because I could not stay there any longer. I was not safe.

I was in far more pain than is considered "normal" for weeks after my surgery. On day seven, when a midwife removed my dressing, she was visibly and audibly shocked at the way I had been cut open and then haphazardly and far too sparsely stapled back together, and at the extent of the severe bruising I had. She asked if she could take photos for my file as she had serious concerns about it.

My connection to my daughter, to my body, and to myself was unforgivably butchered in every way possible.

I lodging a formal complaint with the hospital the response from them was appalling. Initially I received a very short generic letter stating that my complaint and file had been reviewed and there was no issue with the actions of the hospital or any of the staff. I pushed back and finally heard back from a new senior staff member who took it seriously, we had multiple meetings to go through it all, but then they moved on and I no one followed up. I contacted them repeatedly with no response. Finally another meeting was planned, I arrived on the day

only to discover that the hospital representative just didn't turn up, when she was contacted her response was non-committal and no reason was given. I gave up. By this time I had spent close to two years trying to be heard.

During this time I found the support of a psychologist and was diagnosed with PTSD.

I have spent the last 7 years advocating and supporting women through their pregnancies and birth and the inevitable trauma as they fight their way through the same broken maternity system. This is not just a local issue, or state one, but a national one.

My story is not unique. I wish it was. I hear it over and over and over again from family, friends, clients, and literally hundreds and thousands of women who have been brave enough to speak out about their experiences.

Women have been speaking out hoping for change for those that come after, and community and maternity groups have been advocating and supporting and pushing for change, but until they are truly seen and heard, until something is done at a state and federal level, women are going to continue to suffer.

We can not allow this to happen.