

Submission  
No 711

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially  
Confidential

I'm Vanessa, I had my first baby, aged 36, at hospital, September 2015. My prenatal care with a designated midwife was wonderful. I had mentally and physically prepared myself for birth through yoga and Calm Birth. I had a very supportive partner. I had a trouble free pregnancy.

At either my 38 or 39 week appointment, induction and sweeps were raised. I didn't want an induction. I felt pressure to consider a sweep to "move things along" but I asked if I had more time to think about it. I think it was at my 40 week appointment I agreed to a sweep, feeling it might buy time to avoid an induction. I don't believe I was informed that a sweep is a medical intervention and about the great discomfort I could feel after the procedure.

At my 41 week appointment my baby's heart was monitored and I was told there was a deceleration and I'd be referred to the consultant. My partner was with me when the consultant said she wanted to admit me for a c-section. I asked what my options were and she said "you could go home now and your baby could die". I now know that this was coercion however at the time I assumed she had mine and my baby's interests as her top priority. She was playing on every expectant mother's worst fear.

I believe she realised she had deeply upset me, she left the room and returned saying I could stay overnight for further monitoring and she wanted me to be induced the next day. Again, the midwives were wonderful and reassured me that my baby was fine and the additional monitoring showed this. I felt I was now "in the system" and my partner had to leave me alone that last night before I was due an induction.

My designated midwife had been on night shift in the birth centre but popped in to see me before she left that morning. She was aware of my birth plan and suggested I delay, requesting more time for rest or a shower - it later occurred to me that she knew what was in store for me and it would not lead to the birth I wanted.

When a different consultant came to see me that next day it felt as though the induction was a done deal and we weren't consulted about our options, essentially I thought we had no options. She ruptured my membranes as her first intervention, no suggestion of a gel as a first step. After a short time, maybe 1-2 hours, I was put on the syntocinon drip. I was managing well with massage and breathing, no gas or air by choice.

All was calm in the birth suite with two midwives, every time the consultant came in I felt pressure I wasn't doing "birth right" or fast enough. She would increase the syntocinon dose without discussing it. After maybe 4 hours when I consented to a vaginal examination I was at 9cm and the pain still felt manageable. A short time later, maybe half hour, the consultant returned and increased the syntocinon to a point my partner later described as witnessing "someone being tortured". Again, she did this without any discussion of the process but some reference to a stalled labour. Everything now felt very chaotic and there was a loss of calm and control in the room. The midwives tried to explain to me that the consultant was increasing the syntocinon to "give me the best chance of a vaginal birth" and to avoid a c-section. This sent chills through me, it felt as

though I was being hurried to give birth and I was no longer in the calm state that had gotten me to 9cm. I was told, "you're tired" and something along the lines of my baby being stuck.

The next time the consultant came in it felt like I had to have a c-section to stop the unbearable contractions that allowed no time for rest. She was there with the anesthetist and they asked me to sign consent for a c-section. I did, trying to breathe through non-stop contractions, I could barely sit still long enough for the epidural to be administered, the midwives had to hold me firmly to stop me from moving due to the intensity of the contractions.

I had a c-section and felt cheated of the birth I wanted. I believe through coercive actions and lack of informed options, the first intervention set me on the path for a c-section.

A week after my birth I asked to meet the consultant. She explained that she felt she had to get the baby out because it wasn't "cooperating" and a delay could have been damaging to my baby, despite my baby being born with an APGAR score of 9 and perfectly healthy, she said it might not have been the case if they waited. I think her version of events didn't match the reality in the birth suite and that if I had been allowed more time, without the syntocinon level being dramatically increased, I would have birthed my baby vaginally.

I have since had a second baby in England. From the start of my pregnancy I felt informed, partly due to my past experience and subsequent research, and partly because of feeling more consulted rather than coerced. I had a drug-free home birth with two wonderful NHS midwives present. At transition, around 9cm my body went into what some describe as a "rest and be thankful stage". I had a lovely snooze on the floor, then went very quickly into the third stage of labour that lasted just over 10 minutes. I 100% believe that during my first birth, what the consultant said was "stalled labour" was transition and my body and baby knew exactly what to do to help me prepare for a very fast third stage.

I am so grateful to the birth carers and educators I had in England that helped me mentally heal from the trauma I experienced in a NSW hospital. I also became a qualified hypnobirthing teacher in my second pregnancy to know my rights and advocate for myself. Birth can be a wonderful experience with the right support and feeling that you are informed, have options and are empowered to make the decisions that feel right for you and your baby. My second birth I felt in "control" of my birth, not a powerless, uninformed bystander.