

**Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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I have supported women in birth as a doula for 17 years in NSW in all models of care, from private hospitals to home births. The differences I see between the two ends of the spectrum are significant.

When supporting a woman in hospital (most often large tertiary hospitals in Sydney) the feeling is very often that of a battle field- and a race against time. A battle to have her wishes for her birth respected. A race against time before the pressure of intervention comes looming. Women are constantly having to push back against policy, against time frames, against recommendations from higher powers (overseeing obstetricians) to move things along, augment the woman's labour, get the baby born, with little to know respect or consideration of what the woman feels is right for her and her baby.

In comparison i attend a lot of homebirths with privately practicing midwives, who have continuity with a woman right through her pregnancy, birth and postnatal period. When i attend these births i see women respected in their wishes, i see a caregiver who knows the woman's individual story and desires, and i see a respectful partnership which allows birth to play out in it's own time, for a woman to call the shots about what happens in her space and with her body, and i see babies be born into a room full of love, not a room full of stress and pressure and protocol- which is what i so often see in hospitals.

-I have had countless clients have the 'dead baby card' pulled on them (a term we use to refer to medical caregivers offering an intervention, and convincing the woman to agree to it by saying- 'if you don't do this your baby may die').

-I have witnessed multiple doctors cut an episiotomy on women without gaining her consent OR even telling her they are doing it

-I have witnessed interventions done on women such as vaginal examinations or fundal massage after birth where the woman is howling in pain but the practitioner continues

-I have witnessed many many women be heavily pressured over and over again to agree to an induction of labour- purely because of her gestation and without any other risk factors, and i have seen the pressure continue even after she clearly states her desire to not go down that route

-I have seen women, who have clearly stated in early labour that they don't want a syntocinon injection for their placenta after birth, then have to stop the syntocinon needle going in their leg the moment their baby is born- their wishes disregarded, or forgotten

-I have had clients who have made an informed decision to decline the vitamin k injection for their baby after birth, then be lectured by the midwife on why she should give it to her baby, then when that doesn't work, call in the registrar to try and convince her, then when that doesn't work, call in the head paediatrician to lecture on why her baby should have it, saying things like "if you'd

seen the catastrophic things i've seen with Vik K deficiency bleeding you would make a different choice. I really don't want to be looking after your baby if that happens, and seeing you wish you'd given them this small harmless injection."

-I've had a client, pregnant with twins, be called an "incredibly selfish mother" by an obstetrician for declining an induction for her twins when the only reason for induction was that it was a twin pregnancy. There were no signs anything was 'wrong' with the pregnancy. He then told her about the bottle of Grange he was given by another family whose twins he 'delivered safely'.

As a birth worker, the consistent feeling of this battle ground meant i stopped attending planned births in hospital, as i got so demoralised from supporting women to stand strong with their wishes, only to see them be overcome by the powers of the coercive, disrespectful system. There are some amazing birth professionals in these hospitals who are a joy to work with, who stand up for the women they are caring for and put their jobs on the line to help a woman achieve the birth she wants. Midwives who hold an obstetric teams outside the door of a labouring woman's birth suite, who are trying to come in and talk her into interventions she doesn't want- i'm sure those midwives cop an earful later for behaving that way, but they do it for the good of the woman. Sadly the structure of the system is so powerful, and so inherently patriarchal, that those amazing professionals are up against an impossibly strong wall.

I have personally had midwives and obstetricians refuse to acknowledge my presence in the room as a doula, my sense being that they are threatened by having someone on their patch who may support a woman to stand up for themselves.

I now only attend planned homebirths, where i can support women in her plans for her birth, knowing that these plans will be respected and not undermined. Where i know she will have the ultimate power over any decisions that are made for her and her baby.

I chose to birth my own two babies at home with an independent midwife who i got to know deeply and who i trusted implicitly and i knew trusted me, and they were hands down the most incredible, joyous, powerful, love filled days of my life. They have informed the way i navigate the world, with a deep knowing of inner strength and autonomy and a whole lot of i can do fucking anything!

I spent 5 years making a documentary with three other women about the Australian maternity system called Birth Time: the documentary. It has won 24 international film festival awards and it has been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. It explains far more than i can explain here. Please see it. Please.

Thanks you for listening.