

Submission  
No 719

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Heather Leonard

**Date Received:** 14 August 2023

---

Partially  
Confidential

In 2020 I attended my daughter's birth at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital. I was called to help as the staff on the maternity day unit where she was located were putting undue pressure on her and she wanted backup.

I was horrified by what I witnessed as my daughter's support person. I saw staff lie to her face about what facilities the hospital did and didn't have, "play the dead baby" card multiple times and fail to explain benefits and risks of the course of actions they proposed. I knew they were lying as I had spent decades teaching childbirth education at this very hospital. Now every bad story I had heard from mums in my class and dismissed as "bad luck" or an exaggeration was playing out before my eyes.

At one point a female doctor told my daughter she was going to do a cervical examination (not asked) and while doing so performed a stretch and sweep without consent. This was done while her husband and I were both in the room. She was so brazen about it, my daughter felt she had been raped and I had been witnessed it, unknowing and unable to do anything.

To cut a long story short her severe medical condition was missed then mismanaged, her induction was bungled, when she needed an emergency caesarean they messed that up too. The baby needed extensive resuscitation. She and her partner were severely traumatised by the whole sequence of events that occurred over a multi-day stay, which effected their bonding and has taken years of intensive therapy to recover from.

I wrote a complaint to the hospital about the treatment in general and the doctor who performed the stretch and sweep (ie assault) in particular. After the complaint was lodged I got a phone call from the hospital profusely apologising for my daughter's experience. The woman on the phone said that they are hoping to be able to put more staff on the maternity day unit to reduce staffing pressures (this was only a "hope", and staffing levels overall have only gotten worse since then, so I doubt it got done). They also said that the doctor who had done the stretch and sweep without consent had been terminated. Apparently there had been other complaints about her (surely one complaint of assault is enough?) but I know she would've just moved to another hospital more desperate for staff and continued doing whatever she wanted to whatever body was in front of her. Certainly there would have been no changes to hospital policies or protocol, and I don't think it would ever change from inside the hospital itself - this inquiry and the potential for top-down maternity system changes feel like the only reason for hope at this point.

There needs to be laws against obstetric violence, better staffing ratios, and woman-centred, respectful care for all. Additionally every mother should have access to continuity of care with a midwife. She has since gone on to have a second child birthed with a private continuity of care midwife and the treatment throughout the pregnancy, birth and postnatal period were like chalk and cheese and her mental health is infinitely better for it.