

Submission
No 725

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Bianca Lee
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Partially
Confidential

Dear members of the committee,

I want to introduce myself my name is Bianca Lee I am 31 years old, married and have two beautiful little boys ages 4 and 1. I live in NSW in the region.

I am writing to make my submission to the inquiry into birth trauma and make myself known to be open to giving evidence at any hearings.

My first birth experience started in 2018 and lasted till Jan 2019 at hospital when my son was born. It all began at the very start in the booking process. When I called I enquired about the group midwifery practice. The booking person on the phone dismissed me and said that there would be no places even though I called when I found out I was pregnant at 6 weeks. Being a first time mum I didn't know how important this phone call would potentially how if I had more knowledge it could have changed my whole birth experience.

My entire pregnancy with my first was unremarkable, no complications, baby was measuring perfectly. However I always found in my first pregnancy babies movements were always all over the place and when I had a routine appointment at hospital I mentioned this to the OB that I was allocated to see at the time. His response was 'do you think you need to go be monitored' I stated in response I don't know, I don't really know what's considered normal and the OB's response was 'well what do you want to do?' At this point I was seeking guidance and I got a lack of empathy, compassion or even information. The OB was clearly just in a hurry to get through the massive backlog of patients waiting to be seen. Understandable but not acceptable I'm a medical setting.

Fast forward to when I went in to the hospital I was in labour told to go home because it would be a while as they checked me doing an internal and I was only 2cm. Contractions were strong and consistent but because I was a first time mum they believed it would be a while even though I feel they were looking at me as an individual. I then went home and my water broke I called the maternity ward and was told to come back in. It was a 30 min drive from our house back to My total labour was 3.5 hours. Knowing this it's almost a possibility if I didn't trust my body and listened to the maternity ward I would have been giving birth on the side of the road.

When I got into hospital they didn't initially check me and they asked 'what's your pain threshold?' Inferring that I was exaggerating the amount of pain that I was in. What the midwives and OB didn't take into account was how quick I was progressing and how no one knew this because no one initially checked on me and this then cascaded into them not organising the epidural when I asked as they didn't think I would be far enough along, however I was already passed 6cm dilated when I was asking and they finally got around to checking me. I didn't particularly want vaginal exams but this was needed to tick their boxes as apparently it's the only way they could see if I was progression. I now know this isn't true and dilation doesn't tell you much if anything about how long labour will be.

The epidural finally did come it was too late and I was pushing my baby out the OB didn't allow the epidural and wanted me to push the baby out. They kept telling me to stop pushing. Still unsure as to why they never communicated this to me, they never discussed anything to me or even my husband who was my support person while I was in labour. I kept pushing my body was doing it on its own I didn't have a choice and it felt like relief every time I got to push even though I had a room full of people yelling at me to stop but still didn't provide any reasoning and this led to a lot of stress and anxiety on my part as my body was doing it alone. They kept asking me to lay on my back but I physically couldn't it felt like my back was breaking but they didn't care they didn't help me into easier positions, they didn't offer any solutions they just became visibly angry when I couldn't follow instructions.

In the pushing process the OB said the baby needs to come out now due to decreased heart rate and without warning without consent she performed an episiotomy with no pain relief. My vagina was cut open without any pain relief. I screamed. This pain was far worse than any pain I'd felt in labour. A surgical cut with no pain relief. I still feel that this is further than birth trauma. This is assault. I can still 'feel' the cut when I think about my child's birth. I can't even explain what that feels like having a part of your body cut and torn open. I hope no one else has too.

After my son was born apgars of 9 and 9 respectively and breathing beautifully. This has led me to do further research and question how I'm distressed baby could have been when he had such high apgar scores. I've also since learnt in recent research papers that constant CTG monitoring in labour doesn't appear to have an increased positive outcome to mothers or their babies. I was then left to sit in a puddle of my own blood for 2/3 hours until the OB came back to stitch me up. When she finally did she apparently gave local anaesthetic however I could still feel everything and I was screaming in pain saying I could still feel it and her response was 'well you shouldn't be able to feel anything' my husband stood up and said if she said she can feel it she can feel it. I believe she tried to further provide anaesthetic however I could still feel everything. She seemed angry at me because she couldn't understand how I could still feel it. She continued to stitch me up with me feeling everything in tears. Again this feels more like assault pregnant women and birthing women still need to be able to provide consent. After she left the midwife who was lovely got me a new blanket helped me to the shower and even made a comment saying 'that was brutal' after this experience I was scared shaking and dizzy but no follow up or care was offered. I didn't even want to wheel my baby out of the birthing suit I was scared I would fall and I voiced this and not once did anyone offer any help. No one asked about breastfeeding no one provided any help no one came to check on me other than your standard stats they check which was really not useful to anyone.

Being discharged home I was left in extreme pain, I was scared and thought about self harm. I was too scared to seek help for depression and anxiety and I didn't have any professionals that were a constant. I was so scared I remember lying on the depression questionnaire because I was scared. I can still to this day feel the episiotomy scar, it still aches and affects my day to day life.

In contrast my second child birthed at [redacted] I ended up developing pre eclampsia, I was high risk and yet I was listened to, treatment plans discussed and even organised to have the epidural at the beginning of labour, even though my second born [redacted] had other plans and came very quick in 1.5 hours and earlier than expected which meant the birth plan didn't come to fruition, I still

felt like I had a choice, I still felt heard and I felt more than an incubator. Another note is the midwives at hospital seemed far more competent than and had more autonomy in their work and further upskilling which lead to a better experience.

In conclusion the treatment of women in labour is below par, the bar is so low that the total hospital system needs a complete overhaul as without significant change and evidence based policies and care handed back to more competent midwives. We need better aftercare for women one check at 6 weeks is not enough. We need better support in regards to breastfeeding, we need more options to birth the way women want to whether that's in hospital a birth centre or at home and we need practices and policies to catch up with the current research.

I appreciate your time and I would gladly be willing to provide further evidence if required. Women need a voice. Women need to feel safe.

Kind regards,

Bianca Lee