

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

Hello, I am the mother of two beautiful girls and experienced two overall positive births. I was fortunate enough to be in the group midwife practice at my local hospital - I loved my midwife and she supported by goal of a natural physiological birth.

During the birth of my first daughter my main midwife was not on call so another member of her team met us in the birthing suite. My waters had broken so she asked to see my pad - she claimed that it looked like there was meconium on my pad meaning my baby would need to be continually monitored. The machine she strapped to my swollen belly was uncomfortable and kept falling off, the reading wasn't working and she needed to keep adjusting it. I'm not sure after how long I got sick of it and took it off. She then left us alone for what seemed like a very long time. I asked my husband to go get her to use the Doppler to check on my baby. I was confused as to why initially I needed to be continually monitored to not being monitored at all if there was a real risk.....? A little later as I went through transition she came into the room and announced - it sounds like things have progressed, you know I will need to examine you at some stage?

I wasn't aware that I could say no to a vaginal exam as she didn't ask me but told me she needed to check me. It was excruciating to lay on my back and try to be still whilst in active labour. She advised that I was 9cm and not to push as I could cause my cervix to swell and stop my baby descending. She told me I needed to fight all the urges in my body and not push. This was impossible for me so she recommended gas - I felt I had no other choice as I could not manage the pain of going against what my body was naturally doing.

After I don't know how long she again said she would examine me to see if I had dilated further. It was excruciating again to be on my back for another vaginal examination. This time she said I was at 10cm and could actively be involved in birthing my baby.

Just after this my main midwife came in and took over. My baby was born peacefully and calmly in the water and lifted into my arms. I then naturally birthed my placenta. During the birth debrief with my main midwife I told her what had happened regarding the 9am-10cm vaginal examinations and she told me that if she had have been there she would have let me trust my body and go with the sensations. If this had have happened I never would have required the gas nor been in such pain during the examinations.

Although I did feel supported and respected by both midwives (the first also stayed and took videos and photos of my daughters birth which I will be forever grateful) she did not give me informed consent regarding the use of the CTG or the vaginal examinations. I feel she was following the hospital policy rather than allowing physiological birth to happen.

With the birth of my second daughter, I was again in the group midwife practice and was lucky enough to have the same main midwife who I had a great relationship with. My second daughter was coming very quickly however and we only just made it into the birthing suite. The midwives in the GMP didn't make it. I was birthing her standing up leaning against the side of the bath. During one contraction I didn't want to push as I tore during my first birth and wanted to go slower. It

was all happening very quickly so my body and instincts were telling me to take a minute to breath through the contractions. The midwife who was supporting me told me I had to push, I tore again.

Straight after my daughter was born, I was still standing and she had been passed up to me, I was cradling her in my arms, I hadn't even made it over to the bed yet. Someone was standing next to me with a needle and syringe in a dish about to give me an injection. I yelled at them to get away from me as I didn't need that. No one bothered to ask me or my husband if I wanted a managed third stage, it was just assumed that I would have the injection. It seemed crazy to me after I had birthed my daughter completely naturally that I would need pharmaceuticals to birth the placenta.

After I did naturally birth the placenta the midwife from the MGP (not my main midwife as she wasn't on call) who assisted me with it started giving me a fundal massage. This is not something that happened with the birth of my first daughter from memory. This midwife pushed so hard, it was incredibly painful. She was apologising at the time but I had to get her to stop. She didn't give me an option or explain to me what she was doing. It was really horrible to experience after a very quick but positive birth.

I experienced second degree tears during both my births, perhaps because I was told to push when if uninstructed I may have taken things slower. I was never given an option as to if I wanted stitches or not. No one explained to me the difference between having stitches or not, I then could have made the decision as to if I wanted them. It was quite painful to have the stitches especially while I was trying to initiate breastfeeding with my babies for the first time. The midwives were very gentle and explained what they were doing but the choice to have them or not was never given to me.

Although both these births were positive and I felt mostly respected and supported, I felt that hospital policy and procedures overrode supporting birth in a physiological way. There were never any emergencies during my births, so I don't see why the midwives couldnt have taken the time to explain to me more about CTG or vaginal exams and how subjective they are, or given me some information about fundal massage or stitches. And especially asking for consent before injecting something into me.

Back to my postpartum with my first daughter. We were 3 days PP and the midwives were coming to my home to check in on us. My daughter was having a hard time latching to my breast so we had been topping her up with my colostrum with a syringe. She was quite sleepy and didn't seem super interested in feeding. The midwife who came this day was a different midwife and she immediately introduced a whole bunch of interventions to our breastfeeding - she did not give me any informed consent. Nipple shield, expressor and bottles. My daughter didn't take to the bottle straight away and she had a slight temperature so the midwife sent us to the hospital. I was so confused and upset as I didn't realise there was anything wrong.

Whilst in the hospital we had a successful feed with a nipple shield and my milk came in that evening. Despite this my daughter was put on antibiotics through a drip and I was advised to start

triple deeding her - despite the fact that she hadn't lost any weight. The next morning when the dr was doing rounds he discovered a heart murmur so we were referred to a heart specialist. We couldn't leave the hospital till we had seen the specialist however it was a long weekend and we couldn't get in for 3 days. She was feeding fine and didn't have a temperature anymore however we were told we had to stay in the hospital. I had to go home for a shower each day as it was the only thing keeping me sane and one day we got back and my daughter had been given a dummy without our consent. I asked the midwife what happened and she looked at me and said - well you weren't here were you. This made me feel so guilty and horrible. My home was a 5min drive from the hospital and I had given instruction that I would come back straight away.

Once discharged from the hospital I was given next to no support to stop using the nipple shield or what to do regarding the triple feeding. I was at a high risk of developing mastitis as we stopped triple feeding back at home. Fortunately I did not but it took us 4 months to wean off the nipple shield - it was extremely emotional.

I feel that at 3 days pp when my baby wasn't latching properly I just needed a bit more time. I feel she had a temperature because we had too many layers on her. If someone could have stayed with me for a little longer, or perhaps we could have persevered with the syringe top ups until my milk came in we never would have needed to go to the hospital. Spending a week in the NICU having your baby separated from you and hooked up to an IV and oxygen monitor at 3 days old was super traumatic.

She did have a heart condition however it was benign and it never would have mattered if we never discovered it.

I wish that every women was given their own midwife or two. That the hospital policies meant that women needed to give informed consent before any intervention. That physiological birth was supported more. That routine procedures were stopped.

I wish women were supported to birth their babies without so much fear and trauma inflicted.