

Submission
No 744

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Abbey Whitley

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my first son in Hospital in May 2021.

I had unfortunately missed out on being a part of the Midwife Group Practice and instead started my pregnancy care as GP Shared Care then chose to switch to the Midwife Care Stream.

I had a pretty unremarkable pregnancy and although having received a Gestational Diabetes diagnosis, remained low risk and unmedicated.

As a registered nurse, I wanted to be as prepared and informed of my choices as possible and both attended a Calm Birthing Course and did my own research into how I would like to birth my baby.

I went into spontaneous labour at 39 weeks +4 days at home. I laboured well at home with the support of my husband and decided with the support of the midwives at the hospital to make my way to the maternity ward once my contractions were regular and strong.

Things progressed quickly once I arrived at the hospital and I was in transition before being admitted to the birthing suite. This meant my husband and I had little opportunity to go through our birthing preferences with the midwife we were allocated on the day. When it was time to start pushing, we tried to highlight the most important parts of our birthing plan to our midwife, to which she immediately suggested that these were merely ideals, and that pushing on your back and an episiotomy were sometimes necessary. Both my husband and I very clearly voiced our disagreement and highlighted we would not consent to an episiotomy.

My baby was born without complications or intervention and my husband was able to receive him.

The midwife then informed me that I had a "nasty tear" that "wouldn't have been so bad if you'd let me do an episiotomy". At this vulnerable time, I felt that I was being told I'd made the wrong decision.

While receiving stitches for a 2nd degree tear, the doctor asked me to let them know if I could feel discomfort following the local anaesthetic. Multiple times I verbally informed them that I could feel the stitches and was in pain. This would have been supported by my body language as I was crying, tense and withdrawing physically. The doctor replied "I've run out of anaesthetic so would have to go get more. Did you want to have some gas? Let's just finish it quickly." And the midwife encouraged me to focus on feeding my baby as a distraction. Much later, my midwife came in and mentioned she wasn't aware that I was a registered nurse, and had she known she may have worded things differently throughout the process. Although my birth experience was so magical and I felt so empowered, this aftercare experience made me feel that my concerns were not valid and that I was expecting too much to be comfortable for the procedure. I regret

not being more assertive as this experience has impacted the memory of what is meant to be a beautiful time.

I gave birth to my second son in February 2023 at the same hospital, but was lucky enough to have an amazing MGP team oversee my pregnancy and birth care. Again, my labour progressed quickly and my allocated midwife was not available. However this did not negatively impact my labour and birth as she was patient and sought to understand what we were hoping for. My second baby was born without complications or interventions. Unfortunately, I experienced a 2nd degree tear however the treatment was starkly different from my first. The doctor would immediately stop the procedure if I voiced any discomfort, provide more anaesthetic and wait until I was ready to continue. This meant I was comfortable and relaxed. I was left feeling more in control of my body and that my concerns would be taken seriously.

Although my experience doesn't impact my day to day, looking back on the way I was treated has motivated me to contribute this submission in hopes it will improve the future treatment of women in the post birth period. We are fearless warriors, but we also need to be cared for like our bodies matter.