

Submission
No 754

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Jenna Menzie

Date Received: 10 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Baby 1: January 2020

I needed fertility assistance to fall pregnant. I had a miscarriage and then had another pregnancy. I was extremely anxious after the miscarriage and also had a fear of giving birth. My pregnancy wasn't easy, I suffered from morning sickness until 18 weeks. At around 20 weeks my blood pressure started to elevate and I was started on blood pressure medication. At 32 weeks I was told there was a 50/50 chance of me having our baby early as she wasn't growing. I ended up with pre eclampsia and had a IUGR baby at 37 weeks. I was so anxious and scared that my OB suggested seeing a perinatal psychologist which I did to help me process the birth and coping techniques. I also mentioned that I was more than happy to have a C-section to my OB but she assured me that I would be fine to deliver naturally. And it would be better for my recovery.

I managed to have a fairly ok birth with my first one thanks to the epidural that I had insisted upon. It took 6 months for me to come off the medication for my blood pressure post birth.

Our baby was 6 weeks old when Covid hit and dealing with lockdown and a little baby and lack of support was hard.

Baby 2: June 2022

Again I suffered from a miscarriage prior to our successful pregnancy. This time it occurred in the second lockdown and I had to go through this without the support of my husband as he wasn't permitted into the hospital or my OB appointments.

Once falling pregnant, I again suffered with extreme morning sickness and when I spoke to my OB she said it was better to rest at home that I would be fine. I was sick multiple times a day. My blood pressure started to elevate early on in this pregnancy and again I was medicated. There were already signs that the baby's growth was slow.

Halfway through my pregnancy I went to my OB appointment where my medication was increased yet again. She informed me that she wouldn't be here for my next one but she would have another doctor filling in as she was having some time off. She didn't elaborate and when I went to make my next appointment I was informed by the receptionist that she wasn't sure how long the dr would be on medical leave for. When I asked if she would be here to deliver my baby I was told she wasn't sure and that whoever was on rotation would take care of me. I was completely blindsided, anxious and scared. More than anything I needed and wanted continued care which is why I chose to go through the private system.

I was not happy and spoke up and they found a solution that worked - see one of the doctors on her rotate and she would take me on as a patient. I saw this new doctor and she calmed me down, changed my medication and my blood pressure started to level out. After a month my original doctor was back from her leave and I was told I had to return to her. At this stage

my anxiety and fear of the birth again were higher than ever. I was so scared that things weren't going well, my blood pressure was so high and the baby's growth was deteriorating. My husband had not been able to come to any of my appointments due to Covid even though we were through all the restrictions. I would come home from each appointment in tears not feeling like I was being listened to and so scared of what was to come.

At 35 weeks I was told to pack as I might be returning due to the baby and my blood pressure, but the doctor decided to push it out a week. I discussed my birth preferences with my OB and again expressed that I was more than happy to have a C-section - it would give me control of the situation and it did not worry me. I would rather that than have forceps, episiotomy. My husband was finally able to come to the last 2 appointments and he was shocked at how vague my OB was being. My whole birth plan centred around me being able to have the pain relief of an epidural. She will be fine the OB said it will be better for the recovery to go natural even though I was so scared and in tears.

When I was admitted to be induced I gave the midwife my birth preferences and was in tears explaining how scared and anxious I was. I still felt like I wasn't being taken seriously.

I had 'unfavourable conditions' and they used the tape overnight where not much happened. They then broke my waters the next morning and put the drip in my hand. What I didn't expect to happen was what did happen. My daughter arrived quickly - 51 minutes in total.

I went from unfavourable conditions, crying with fear, anxiety and nerves to my husband, the doctor and midwife to having a baby. The epidural that I had asked for didn't happen. The midwife offered me gas which I didn't want but tried it to help while I was waiting for the epidural made me vomit. I was vomiting and crying that I could feel the baby coming. The midwife wasn't in the room and I was screaming and begging my husband to make this stop. My OB didn't even make it and the midwife only just made it. There was no pushing. I was screaming and in so much pain that I was passing out and couldn't comprehend what had happened. My husband said he had never been so scared for me and he felt helpless not being able to do anything.

I'm not sure how this should have even had happened with someone who had PIH and a baby with IUGR.

I then had 10 days in hospital with our baby in special care nursery.

I then suffered from vivid flashbacks and nightmares and panic attacks. I couldn't stand to be touched. I spend 3 months living in a complete fog crying daily about how this could have happened. Waking up in the middle of the night as if I was going through this trauma again.

I didn't see my OB in the hospital after as she was on holiday.

At my 6 week checkup I don't even know how I made it into the doctors. I had a panic attack in the bathroom before going in. The OB was not helpful or supportive and just made comment about how it wasn't easy having her go on leave and another problematic pregnancy.

My biggest regret is that I didn't stand my ground and change doctors or been insistent on what I wanted. I had a genuine fear, no different to someone having a fear of spiders. Giving birth was my fear. And I wasn't being heard despite saying it.

I have officially been diagnosed with PTSD and take medication after this experience.

On reflection, I think doctors and midwives need to take the birth mother and their partner more seriously. Just because they work in it daily doesn't mean our views should be dismissed or our concerns and worries are not valid. More transparent information forms or compulsory questionnaires so that views and opinions are heard and clear by the midwives and doctors.

If I had have been listened to and given a C-section like I had asked instead of being told I would be fine I wouldn't have suffered through months of agony. I would have had physical recovery but not the mental scars that are still there 13 months later. I also look back and think what else could have gone medically wrong given the circumstances and wonder why it wasn't a C-section to reduce the risks.