

Submission
No 757

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I had a traumatic birth experience with my first child at hospital in February 2019. My labour from start to finish was approx. 4 hours and I had a difficult time with midwives who did not believe I was in labour, resulting in a traumatic birth experience. I started contractions at approx. 5 am, which quickly progressed, where I phoned for advice, as I was a first time mum and did not have any idea what was normal, as my antenatal care was uninformative about actual delivery. When I gave my information, I was told to wait until my waters broke or I started bleeding. This happened at 7:30 am, where I was then instructed to go to the delivery suite for a review.

Once we arrived into the exam room, the midwife asked if I had a UTI because I was only 39 weeks and as this was my first baby, it was unlikely I was in labour. I tried to explain that I felt like I was in labour and that I had the urge to push and was told "don't be ridiculous, it's your first baby you'll be here for a while yet". She then proceeded to ask questions like had I had intercourse the night before because I was only experiencing a small loss of frank blood. I was then asked to attend a MSU to rule out a UTI- by this time I was unable to speak clear sentences due to the level of pain. I was in the bathroom for approx. 5 minutes, as my contractions had intensified, where I began to experience three contractions back to back, then my waters suddenly broke whilst on the toilet.

My husband came to see if I was okay because the midwife had asked him "has she fallen in the toilet? What's taking so long?" Once my husband took me back to the exam room, another midwife came in and asked if she could do an internal exam. I gave consent but continued to explain I felt the urge to push, which the original midwife again met with annoyance. The second midwife began to attend the internal exam but immediately gave a look of panic and stated to the other midwife "um she's right, she's already fully dilated, I can feel the head". Chaos then ensued in the room, where approx. four midwives were in the room, transferring me via wheelchair to another room to deliver. They stated that they did not have any beds left and would need to clear out a room just used.

We arrived into the room filled with linen skips overflowing with soiled linen, random equipment piled up, contaminated waste bags on the bed and floor- as a Registered Nurse all I could think of was the cross contamination risks spread across the room. They then told me to hop up onto my knees as would be easier to push and began throwing warm water on my vagina and perineum to "help soften the area"- I was already fully dilated and pushing at this stage. I then began to feel my whole perineum split open and gave birth a few seconds later. The midwife viewed my tears with a dolphin torch that was almost out of battery and told me I only had one tear near my urethra so was getting the obstetric registrar to review in case I needed a catheter.

She then shoved a rolled up wash cloth up my vagina to "stop the bleeding", which tore me further. The registrar came up and scolded the midwife as they didn't provide an adequate source of light and when they did, I actually had a 2nd degree perineal tear, 2nd degree labial tear and 2 grazes resulting in over 60 sutures taking almost 2 hours to attend too. The whole experience was chaos, terrifying, uninformative and honestly barbaric. I could not speak about my birth for almost 2 years without becoming either extremely upset or angry. I also

chose not to have another child until almost 4 years later due to my fear of having the same experience again.

Fortunately, I had my second daughter through Midwifery Group Practice and my experience was a completely holistic and informative one– including my antenatal, delivery and post-partum care. My positive experience second time around confirmed the multitude of things lacking in my first and that my feelings of trauma were valid. My hopes with this enquiry is that no one ever has to go through childbirth without having their voice heard, especially my own daughters in the future.