

**Submission
No 769**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Date Received: 9 August 2023

My name is Josie Quinn and I experienced a traumatic birth with my first child. After having a textbook smooth pregnancy I think as arranged to have an induction at 40 plus four days. I had Cervidil inserted at 9am in the morning to kickstart the labour process. By late afternoon I had been experiencing strong pain and the cervidil was still in me. I go into the zone to try to get through pain and I feel this was a disadvantage for me as when I tried to tell the nurses I was worried about the level of pain I was told "if you were in that much pain you wouldn't be able to speak". I had a foetal heart rate monitor on my stomach until I went into the shower to relieve some pain. I asked my husband to go and get one of the nurses after experiencing sudden shooting pains in my groin to which the nurse who came in told me that she didn't think I had progressed but could check some things just in case.

When she put the heart rate monitor on it showed the baby was in distress and in an instant monitors were sounding, nurses rushed me to a bed and a dr came in. The atmosphere was tense and the Dr spoke disapprovingly asking the nurse why the cervidil had been left in so long and why I had not been monitored earlier. The dr had my obstetrician on the phone and within minutes I was being prepped for an emergency C section. By then my husband asked what was happening as we couldn't get anyone's attention, the Dr quickly said the baby was going into cardiac distress. Hearing that I went into the zone , I remember thinking if the baby's heart is going into distress I need to be as calm as possible to help the baby. I shut my eyes as they ran me down the hallway to the operating theatre, I could feel my legs bouncing on the bed as my body shook but I tried to keep my mind still.

As they rushed me in to theatre my husband was left outside, he wasn't allowed in the theatre as they didn't have time to get him in scrubs. He remember our obstetrician rushing past him and going straight in. My husband John waited outside that operating theatre alone after the most stressful time of our lives. As it was during covid with heavy restrictions I had only been allowed to have one support person instead of the usual two person allowance which left John alone at this difficult time. By this time it was almost midnight when our baby was delivered by emergency c section. I had to be put under general anaesthesia so I was not conscious for the birth. I was told the reason for this was because it was too much of an emergency there was not time for anything else.

So my husband was not present for the birth and I was unconscious. However grateful I am that my beautiful baby was healthy and alive I feel there was a disappointing level of foetal monitoring that escalated the outcome of emergency. I was dissatisfied with the attitude towards me during the induction when I was in pain I was belittled and dismissed by the nursing staff in the birthing suite. The attitude by them was very much that I had not dilated enough to be taken seriously and img husband and I were left alone in the birthing suite and forgotten about until the pain had gotten unbearable. We had asked for assistance and made to feel like we were overreacting but I knew something wasn't right and asked them ti come again and that's when the monitor showed the baby's heart rate was in an emergency state. I hate to think what could have happened had we not spoke up and asked for some help.

After an entire day of contractions brought on by my induction, to then be followed by an emergency c section was very painful. I couldn't walk for days after and once I could I could only hobble around. This lasted weeks, I was shocked at how much pain I was in even once

returning home. I needed help at times moving around the house, I couldn't take deep breaths, I asked no one to try to make me laugh and avoided coughing as it was utterly excruciating. I felt like I had been hit by a bus. My second birth reinforced how I had felt as I had a planned c section for my second birth and I was shocked at the difference in pain and recovery after.

The emergency c section after a day of labouring meant that I struggled to hold my baby, I physically struggled with strong pain and movement for weeks once returning home. I was mentally in shock from what we had been through and my husband was traumatised. Especially as it was during covid we did not have any visitors for the five days we were in hospital. We needed our mothers help, we were struggling with exhaustion and shock after the birth and it was extremely isolating for us both as we tried to adjust. I was on heavy painkillers the first few days, my poor husband was having to care for me and the baby, which is obviously expected when you have a child but after experiencing the intensity and trauma of the emergency it was an extra layer we felt took a toll on us. I feel the nurses in our aftercare were very sympathetic towards us and really we had a great level of care and help given to us once on the recovery side with breastfeeding and such.

I now know that I did not realise the depth of trauma I felt. I was too exhausted from it all and had my new baby to care for to give it any thought. But in the months that followed I felt sick and anxious thinking about our experience. I am not happy that we never got an explanation as to why things went the way they did, our Dr said the nurses should have contacted her sooner and checked on me more but it was really brushed over. The blame was passed around to the point we couldn't get a clear answer and was just told these things happen all the time. Considering our Dr said we could have lost our baby I felt I expected to get a call from the hospital or something to clarify some things or sort of a follow up but that didn't happen so we were left feeling like 'what the hell just happened? And how did that happen to us when we were told inductions are done all the time and fairly mislead as to the smooth sailing of it.

I went to drop my forms into the hospital the register for my planned c section for my second baby. It hit me when I was sitting in the car park mustering up the strength to go in and drop my forms off. I was surprised at the overwhelming feeling of emotion I felt by being back at the hospital. I couldn't hold back the tears as I sat in the car. It was a struggle for me to walk back into that hospital and hope for the best again. On the day of my planned c section I was so excited to meet my baby but I couldn't hold in my emotions and felt anxious not knowing what might go wrong. Everyone kept saying things to me like "don't worry, planned c sections are pretty straightforward and we do them everyday" which echoed to me what I had been told when checking in for my induction as I was told "inductions are very standard and you will roll through the different stages".

I have a very caring and loving husband who was by my side through it all. We both have close and supportive families. If I did not have that I don't know what impact my traumatic experience could have had. I feel so sorry for any women out there who have also been overlooked while in labour who were alone. I don't like the attitude some birthing suite staff have that 'oh it's not that bad'. Why does it have to be so bad before you're then able to get help. Women shouldn't have to tough it out. There is a toxic attitude towards expected pain

and trauma for women when birthing babies. When women shouldn't be shamed or told they aren't in that much pain. Each birth is unique so staff shouldn't assume someone is fine because everybody expresses pain differently. I am writing to this inquiry because I want every birthing mother to be given time and attention they deserve. I was a self funded private patient in the public hospital and was given very little attention throughout my labour. I don't want other women to experience this.