

Submission
No 775

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Sammi, I am 33 years old, live in [redacted] NSW and had a baby on 16th January 2022, in the middle of the Omicron wave.

I was lucky enough to get into the MGP at [redacted]. My best friend was a midwife there so had me on the waitlist as soon as I fell pregnant. For others who got pregnant at the same time in all areas of Sydney and [redacted] they weren't as lucky to get into an MGP.

As I was pregnant throughout Covid lockdowns, my partner wasn't allowed to come to any appointments or any scans throughout term. We did a few courses that the hospital offered as well as Calmbirth and The Birth Circle. We were planning a publicly funded homebirth under the [redacted] program led by Dr [redacted].

Our MGP group were incredible. Consistency of care was wonderful and made me feel super well educated and I felt advocated for throughout the whole pregnancy as well as during my birth.

Due to Covid ramping up during my birth month, our group went from five midwives to two and were unable to staff my homebirth. I was also 41+ 5 which was also too far along to comply with their homebirth program criteria. I was disappointed but understood the situation was unique in our "new reality". We'd been hearing about how scarce staffing in the hospitals and ambulance services were anyways so the risk of homebirth was escalating.

One of the midwives who worked at the [redacted] ended up delivering in the car on the way to the hospital because the ambulance wasn't able to reach her in time! What a time to be alive.

My Water's broke one evening, and I laboured for over 40 hours at home after a stretch and sweep before contractions halted. The next morning I went in for an induction because they were short staffed and already had some booked in the following days, it made sense to escalate the labour to have it asap. Especially as I wanted my bestfriend/midwife to be there.

I continued to labour for another 8 hours on Sentosin but every time I contracted or sat down, baby's heart rate would plummet. We did scalp prick twice and continued the induction but after a while, I was so exhausted and we made the decision to have a C-Section after talking through the potential options. Once we did that, the entire mood, energy and vibe completely changed. All of a sudden, midwives aren't my carers, and OB's and anaesthetists are. It became very clinical and I was completely overwhelmed that I just let out this huge roar and started wailing. I was asked to sign all these papers around the risks involved with anaesthetic, and surgery, people were changing my clothes and it all just escalated once the term "emergency ceasar" kept being thrown around, even though bub wasn't in any immediate danger.

I was aware that birth plans never go to plan. But I wasn't prepared for the tectonic shift I was experiencing mentally and emotionally. I think throughout my education in pregnancy I really felt empowered to push naturally and have a holistic beautiful birthing experience. And it felt

like any intervention was going to be cheating. My best friend/midwife, partner and I just held each other for a moment and cried together mourning what was supposed to be my beautiful birth. And after a minute I declared it was time to get our shit together and get baby out.

What the courses lacked in my opinion is what to expect in the case of a C-Section. They're so common now because our health system is trying to be so risk adverse and run like a business, in churning patients in and out as fast as possible, but also so short staffed. Any signs of risk, they are trying to limit morbidities and mortalities. All of a sudden I'm being told that the spinal can have a 1/1000 chance of paralysis and all these other statistics are being thrown at you and you have to sign your life away.. because what other choice do you have?

Conversely, people also demonise the cesar in the courses I did, because I understand they want to encourage vaginal births. BUT it was actually fine! We were able to bring our music in the OT, my midwife advocated for skin on skin post birth, we did delayed cord clamping, hubby got to cut the cord.

There was some birth trauma in terms of my experience but not for a lack of professionalism at the hospitals, but perhaps for the education, awareness and processes that are in place. While the anaesthetist had to try four times to get the needle in, everyone on our journey was so professional, caring and lovely.

I know my experience was positive in comparison to others and I feel so lucky to have had a place in MGP and to have had the great fortune of having my best friend be my midwife and advocate. Others who had shared care or lacked consistency of care didn't have the same advocacy at their birth that i did. When you're in that labour state, you cannot think, you cannot make decisions. You're just trying to breathe, so having people who understand what is happening and how you want the experience to be, is CRUCIAL. If it's your first baby, your partner has no idea how to be there for you and is equally overwhelmed.

We had a home visit after we left the hospital from a midwife and their duty of care was nothing short of wonderful. My physical recovery was great, and the newborn phase is definitely not my finest time in life. But it took about 10 months to realise I was having some sort of post partum depression, and after seeing a psychologist, realised it was related to my birth trauma. I did three sessions of hypnotherapy to help my mental state and afterwards have been much healthier and in a better state of mind.

Child birth is dangerous no doubt. But it does NOT have to be a negative and traumatic experience. How can we find the balance between holistic and safe?

I'd love to see more education offered by the hospitals that are free, for those who aren't able to pay for the expensive Calmbirth/Shebirth/Hypnobirthing courses.

I'd love to see MGP offered in regional areas to allow for better consistency of care for those women.

I'd love to see more women being empowered to birth vaginally and have a VBAC should they choose, and to raise awareness of the benefits of that, but equally like to not demonise women who choose to have a cesar.

I'd love to see more regulation or scrutiny put on private OB's who choose to push women to have elective Csections early so that it can fit in with their golfing holidays or weekend schedules or because their baby looks "too big" in these scans that aren't even very accurate.

I'd LOVE to see publicly funded women's physio encouraged from midwives and OBs prenatal and post natally.

Thank you for your time. MIDWIVES ARE ABSOLUTE GODDESSES, please continue to support them.