

**Submission
No 780**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Hanni McHenry

Date Received: 9 August 2023

In August 2022 I went into hospital to birth my baby.

I had specifically chosen to birth in a Birthing Centre to avoid pressure to intervene by Obstetricians if my birth wasn't going to plan.

I had been in labour for a long time but my baby and I were healthy and happy.

I had been assured that the unit was midwife led and there would be no obstetricians present unless in the case of emergency.

When I had been birthing for 7 hours, obstetricians started doing rounds in the midwife-led unit. They made me feel like I had been in labour for too long and it was time to intervene so they artificially ruptured my membranes (AROM). Upon doing so, they discovered meconium in the waters so I was moved to the delivery unit.

Upon arrival, I was hooked up to continuous fetal monitoring. I had just walked over the unit and was feeling worried and stressed so my heart rate was up. Within a few minutes, we had obstetricians coming into the room without announcing themselves saying we needed to intervene immediately - even before we were able to establish whose heart rate was elevated. They said they wanted to attach a monitor to my baby's head to get a more accurate reading of her heart rate without explain this means a probe would be screwed into her scalp.

We asked for 10 minutes to establish the heart rate and a few minutes later an obstetrician barged in and intimidated my husband. He walked towards him so aggressively that my husband had to move out of the way so they wouldn't collide.

He said to my husband "that girl (I am in my 30's) in there is headed for a C-Section" and something to the effect of "if we don't intervene immediately there's a likelihood your child will be born with cerebral palsy". My husband was visibly shaken and asked the obstetrician to leave the room.

A few minutes later, both mine and my baby's heart rates were established and normal, but the rest of the birth my husband was struggling. He was googling cerebral palsy in between my contractions.

Despite the fact that my baby was crowing, during second stage of labour, I was told I had been pushing for too long (2 hours) and that I should have some syntocinon to help the labour along. I didn't want to but I felt defeated. They inserted the cannula and even though I only asked for the lowest dose of syntocinon possible, my husband witnessed the midwife turning up the dose frequently without my consent. I was told I should be on my back using my knees for leverage to help push even though this didn't feel the most natural and comfortable to me.

My husband burst into tears when my baby was born healthy with APGAR scores of 9 & 9 and no signs of disability.

My husband pursued reporting the obstetrician. He asked midwives on the ward what his name was and it became clear he was well practiced in intimidating the midwives too.

What followed in my postpartum journey was even more arduous than the birth. I was determined to breastfeed. I had done multiple breastfeeding courses and even had an antenatal consult with the hospital Lactation Consultant. Immediately, breastfeeding was unbearably painful. I had open sores on my nipples by day 3 despite following all the breastfeeding advice of the midwives and lactation consultants. I was in so much pain I asked my husband to dig his nails into my leg to match the pain during feeds. I remember blood streaming down my top and down my baby's face. I would sob through feeds. I remember losing my appetite unable to eat for days on end.

My baby didn't gain any weight for the first month of her life, without any explanation. I was told to pump after every feed for 20 minutes and then feed her that milk. We were told to wake her every 3 hours day and night for weeks to try and get her weight up. I battled through intense engorgement, 4 bouts of mastitis in the first 6 weeks that would give me chills so bad I would be shivering in a scalding hot shower, vasospasm that felt like razor blades 24/7, persistent thrush that lasted 6+ weeks and such severe nipple damage that a lactation consultant took one look at me and told me I need to stop breastfeeding immediately while I pump and bottle feed my baby until I was properly healed (this took 6+ weeks).

Throughout all this we had as many lactation consultations as we could afford and borrowed money for subsequent consultations (these consults cost \$300+ for an hour and none of this is covered by Medicare).

I asked more than 5 midwives and 3 lactation consultants if my baby had a tongue tie, they all inspected her mouth and said no.

7 weeks in; a more experienced Lactation Consultant discovered our baby had tongue, lip and cheek ties. This started a whole new cascade of appointments including two surgeries. There were many, many moments where I folded, gave up, broke down and felt like I couldn't go on. I had absolutely no support, and suffered deeply. I felt angry that so many midwives and lactation consultants had dismissed me. I felt angry that her oral restrictions could have been addressed much sooner and things may not have gotten so bad. I felt angry that so many professionals' solutions was just to formula feed.

We battled through 3 months of excruciating pain until her ties were released by a professional and another 3 of moderate discomfort while my extensive nipple damage healed and my baby learnt to suck correctly. The support was non-existent. We were out of pocket thousands of dollars. I was a shell of myself; trying to navigate being a new parent alone with the trauma we had faced.