

Submission
No 781

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Danielle Smith

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Partially
Confidential

I had my son in August 2021 in the height of the covid lockdown at hospital. When I called the hospital to let them know I would be coming in and how far apart contractions were they insisted I stay home and that I wasn't ready. Then 30 minutes later I called again, to be told I could present to hospital however I would be required to have an internal examination before they were willing to put me through to a birthing suite. My contractions at that stage were close to 2 minutes apart. I declined the internal exam over the phone but was then told I would be turned away until I accepted the internal examination. I was also told my husband would be required to wait in our car until I was admitted to a birth suite.

Upon arrival I walked by myself up to the birth unit and then asked if my husband could come up which I was told no that it had to wait until I was in a birth suite. I then when asked to have an internal check declined but explained how far apart contractions were and was told I needed to lay in the bed and be hooked up to monitors. Then I was told my husband would not be allowed to support me until I consented to the internal examination. At which point I ended up feeling I had no choice and so had the internal, I was extremely scared, stressed and felt very alone. It was done and I was told I wasn't very far along, my contractions had also unsurprisingly slowed right down (I was really, really anxious and uncomfortable) however despite having the internal exam done my husband then still had to wait in the car while I was required to continue to laying on my back and not allowed to get up because it meant the monitor wasn't getting a good enough read of baby's heart rate.

After 45minutes of being left alone except for twice someone coming in to tell me my husband was still not able to come up they informed me I would be moved to a birth suite but then would be required to have another internal examination once in the birthing suite for my husband to stay with me. So I was left without my support person for approximately an hour and a half. Then when we arrived in the birth suite I was told they wanted to hurry things along and since they let me go to a birth suite and my husband come up they needed to break my waters. After asking several questions we declined but were then in regular intervals told they needed to move things along because the readings on the monitor weren't consistent. So despite not wanting to we consented. They then discovered my waters had broken and I was actually much further along already. But I was still told I wasn't allowed to get off the bed and had to remain attached to the monitor. Then because the midwives weren't happy with the monitor readings they said they needed to put an internal monitor on.

After questioning and asking for more information I was told if I just consented to the internal monitor I would probably be allowed to get up from the bed (we wanted to have as natural and active labour as was possible) so I reluctantly agreed. After 4 failed attempts at getting the internal monitor on my baby's head the midwives called for the doctor. The midwives had assured me that at no point would they do anything during a contraction, this made an awful process bearable. The doctor then came in, didn't look at me, he didn't tell me his name and said to the midwives "what's her problem" they explained about the failed attempts for internal monitor and he grunted at them. He then without asking my consent proceeded to try to put the internal monitor in but before he could my husband said no what are you doing.

Then the doctor told the midwife to tell me I had to proceed with the internal monitor, the midwife explained again to me that the doctor was going to attempt to get the internal monitor in, I at that point asked to talk to my husband and the doctor shook his head in frustration. Then my husband and I decided we wanted to wait because I was quite upset and distressed by this stage. The doctor then said no we can't wait. Then after more pressure from the doctor I agreed as long as nothing happened during a contraction. Then as he went to attempt I had a very obvious contraction and said no wait, the doctor then went to ignore my taking away consent but a midwife stopped him and said "she said no you cannot proceed" then the doctor asked the midwife to tell me to "get over it and he was doing it not contraction or not" the midwife tried to explain things calmly and kindly and I agreed to let him try once, only once and that I did not consent if I was having a contraction. The doctor proceeded to try more than once and ignored my telling him I was having a contraction and his justification was that he almost had it on there.

After this I felt completely violated in so many ways. The doctor then ended up deciding after approximately 20/30minutes that I needed to go for an emergency cesarean as the baby's heart rate was showing clear signs of distress.

We agreed to the c-section, however when the doctor gave me the paperwork to sign he shoved it in my face and said you just have to sign on this line right now, there's no time to read anything. My husband intervened and asked to see the documents and the doctor told him it wasn't his business. I then told the doctor to pass the documents to my husband, which he then read over and gave to me to also read before signing. We both explained that we only consented to the cesarean section and not to any kind of assisted birth eg vaccum or forceps. The midwife told us to write that then cross those options out, so we did that and signed. When we got into the theatre the doctor then explained to the team that they were checking to see if they could get baby out without surgery first, which then 2 midwives and my husband and I both spoke up to tell him we had already said no to those options. He then said yes but it's easier for everyone if we just do it that way anyway. The midwives then advocated again for our rights and the doctor reluctantly proceeded with the surgery.

While my son was then in the special care unit I was also forced to agree to giving formula despite very clearly and often having said we were not okay with formulae and that I would be available for every feed, I was told that no parents were allowed into the special care nursery overnight so my son would either get formula or nothing. I then questioned that again but was told he would not thrive and I was a bad parent for insisting my son only have breastmilk. I also questioned why I wasn't allowed in special care overnight and they explained that I would be in their way and I should just make the most of the sleep and that they were doing me a favour. Eventually after being told multiple times that I was letting my son down I agreed to a formula bottle overnight but only if every other feed was breastmilk and I was given a breast pump to ensure my milk had the chance to come in. However I then came to the special care nursery as early I was allowed to the next morning to find a midwife giving my son a bottle. She said "oh I figured you weren't coming because you said you would be here in 5 minutes so I didn't want to wait".

This happened multiple times in his 4 days in special care, and breastfeeding was quite challenging for us. These are just some of the traumatic experiences I was faced with in hospital and labour. I am also someone who was a victim of sexual assault in my childhood so have found it to be quite a traumatic and triggering experience and have had to work through a lot of past trauma and am still dealing with the trauma of my birth experience.