

Submission  
No 798

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially  
Confidential

I am the proud mother of four health boys, aged 9.5, 8, 3 and 15 months. My last two magnificent births were through [redacted] Midwifery Group Practice and had I known about them for my first two pregnancies I don't believe I would have had the same negative experiences that I did.

I delivered my first son in 2013 when I was 24 years old through [redacted] Private hospital, under the expert gynaecological support of Dr [redacted]. My labour & birth was relatively quick for my first time and after labouring at home for 8 hours made the 1 hour drive to the hospital. 3 hours later my son was born into the arms of my Obs who needed to swiftly untangle my son from the umbilical cord that was around his neck. I would never have known that this had even happened was it not for my mother telling me shortly after. [redacted] was so calm and supportive during the whole pregnancy and his demeanour most definitely helped me birth unmedicated along with the support from the wonderful midwives who assisted in the delivery and immediate aftercare.

My trauma is related to my stay in the [redacted] Private Maternity ward. Although the majority of the midwives were extremely supportive, there were a few that made me feel extremely inadequate as a first time mother.

I delivered my son at around 11.30am and was transferred to the ward after a few hours to rest. My son was with me in the crib and my partner (who was allowed in my room any time of day) had gone back to our home in [redacted] briefly. During this I proceeded to breastfeed my son. I was feeling confident and trusted my instincts that his crying was related to needing to be close to me and be nourished. Shortly after a midwife came through the door, and said told be quite abruptly that I was supposed to buzz then when I fed my baby. I remembered feeling shocked by her tone but didn't think anything of it until she demanded I get out of the bed, undress my baby and sit in a chair to feed him. I had superficial tears but a lot of bruising after the birth. There was a complete lack of empathy and disregard for my pain. She then encouraged me to feed my baby and watched me try and latch him but interrupted me by grabbing my breast and basically shoving it in my baby's mouth. It was forceful and uncomfortable but because she told me "that's how you do it" I thought that it was, despite the pain it caused. I questioned this and was basically told that some pain is normal. So I continued to breastfeed the way she showed me.

I suffered engorgement and severe nipple trauma as a result and my mental health definitely declined. From that negative encounter I doubted myself and my ability to breastfeed my son. After weeks of healing and through the wonderful support of my partner and family, I was able to heal and figure out how to feed my son the way that worked for us.

It is extremely frustrating to expect that breastfeeding should look the same for all women and their babies. Each woman has their own unique features as do their babies and gentle support needs to be offered to all women who choose to breastfeed, without judgement, assumptions and forcing certain ideas or methods of breastfeeding onto nursing mothers.

My second son was born at [redacted] Hospital in 2015. He was born exactly 18 months to the day after my first. I had a different labour and was told my baby was posterior about 12

hours in. I was not offered any strategies to assist in turning my son, so his labour went on for a lot longer than I believe it should have. He was born very quickly when he did finally turn and I suffered some tears. I had a midwife and a student midwife with me for the majority of my labour, along with my partner and mother. The midwives were great, although I believe more support could've been offered to assist in the duration of my labour. When it was time for the resident Obstetrician to do an internal, I remember telling my partner that I didn't need to hold his hand as I anticipated it would be like my experience with my first son, gentle and respectful. This was nothing like that. It was rough and without warning. It felt like the obstetrician was slicing me with a knife. It was excruciating with a complete disregard for my pain. She then asked the student midwife to perform an internal also which was not much better. The complete lack of empathy to my situation at the time made me feel completely violated. There seemed to be no consideration for me as the patient and almost a sense of just get in there and get it done. My mother told me afterwards that I lost all colour in my face whilst it was happening and I do remember a mortified look on my mother's face as she responded to me wincing in pain.

This experience traumatised me more than I knew.

After I delivered my 3rd son 5 years later, with an amazing birth, roadside en-route to Hospital, I was petrified I would experience the same traumatic internal. Thankfully my fantastic Midwife from Midwifery Group Practice understood my anxieties and reassured me that what I experienced was not normal and should never have happened the way that it did. She was able to perform all internal checks and suturing herself which made my whole experience amazing. I felt supported, understood and at ease with the process.

Although my experiences did have a lasting affect I can appreciate the pressures of the hospital system on Midwives and Obstetricians. I believe that if all birthing women have continuity of care that these traumatic events will not occur. Support needs to be offered at a systematic level for women to feel safe and confident in their ability to birth their babies, voice our fears and concerns without judgement.