

**Submission
No 799**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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I had a very traumatic birthing experience through the public hospital system. My daughter was born on the 23rd April, 2022.

I had been admitted 3 days before I had given birth, for monitoring. The decision was made to induce me (at 38 weeks), but I was not told why. I was just told it needed to happen and not much more was explained to me. I had been given the gel the night before to get my cervix ready, and I was wheeled into the birthing unit the next morning. I was told I was 1cm dilated at this point. My waters were broken at 8:30am, and they decided to hold off on the pitocin drip. The drip was turned on at about 10:30 because my body wasn't doing what they wanted. During the next few hours, the midwives and doctors struggled to get the balance of pitocin right. They would turn it up only for me to be contracting almost constantly, and then it would be turned down only for the contractions to become too spaced out. This happened over the next 9 hours. It felt like they were constantly changing the levels of pitocin, trying to get my body to 'labour'. This process was absolutely exhausting. I was getting vaginal examinations every 2-3 hours (which were so painful) only to be told over and over I wasn't dilating as I should, which is so disheartening. Not only was I exhausted due to the physical stress that the drip was putting in my body, but the emotional stress that was put on me because 'my body isn't doing what it should be doing'.

After being in the birthing suite for 12+ hours I had only dilated to 3-4cms. I was told of my options going forward. I could go in for an emergency caesarean now, or wait and see what my body did in the next 2 hours. If nothing happened then I'd need an emergency caesarean anyways. When this was explained to me, the doctor was very pushy about the caesarean being done now. He just kept telling me that even if I was to dilate a little more in the next 2 hours, labour could go for another 24 hours and at the rate I was going a caesarean would need to happen regardless of me labouring for 2 or 24 hours. He made it seem like my only options were to be cut open now, or in a little bit. There was no alternatives given, he didn't explain what could be making this happen or give me any other options to try and help me continue to give birth vaginally. The doctor was also just explaining my options to me (the exhausted mother who was still contracting through this conversation) and not to my support people. The doctor was only directing the conversation to me, he was so quiet in doing so, my support people who were in the room didn't hear what he was saying. I had to then try and tell them what was going on and discuss with them my options.

At this point, I was so overwhelmed by everything. I was sobbing to my family, trying to explain what the doctor was saying, even though I was still trying to understand it myself. We decided that if I was going to be cut open anyways (which is what the doctor said) I might as well go now. I was already so exhausted by everything that had been happening to me all day.

As soon as I said yes to the caesarean, it was like everyone around me started rushing around. From the point I signed the consent form to the time I was in theatre was about 15 mins. I feel like I didn't even have time to wrap my head around what was coming next before it was actually happening. This was my first time being admitted to hospital, and also my first time having any kind of surgery so absolutely everything was new to me. I didn't know what was coming, and it seemed like everyone around me was so caught up in what they were doing that I guess they assumed I knew what was going on and I was just kind of forgotten.

Once in the theatre, it was briefly explained how the procedure was going to go. The anaesthetist was putting the stuff in and the monitors were going on. The anaesthetist kept checking with ice cubes how numb I was, he did this a few times but I could still feel from about my belly button up. The surgeon was asking when I was numb enough to start. The anaesthetist told the doctor 'I'd like for her to be a little more numb higher up but we can start'. They had made the incision and started the procedure. A few minutes in I start feeling intense pain. I had 4 wisdom teeth out with local anaesthesia (2 were surgical removals) so I understand the whole 'you'll feel pressure and movement but no pain' that happens in a caesarean but this pain was so incredibly intense. I start screaming, the anaesthetist puts a little more down my epidural line but it does nothing. Next thing I remember is waking up alone in the recovery ward.

There was absolutely no one around. There was no clock so I didn't know the time. I wanna say about 10 minutes later, a nurse comes around to ask how I'm doing. I ask him what happened, and I ask about my baby and he has no idea what I'm talking about. He tells me I need to wait for the doctor to come and check me out before he can take me to the maternity ward. He tells me the doctor is at least 30 mins away. I had to tell this nurse to put the side of the bed down so I could take myself to the ward. He got really nervous and ended up getting someone else to help him wheel the bed around. Luckily, my partner was there and my baby girl was healthy.

I finally got to meet my daughter 3 hours after she was born. I didn't get that first skin in skin moment. I didn't get the 'golden hour'. I didn't get to give her her first feed. I missed out on all of that. I got to wake up alone and terrified in a different ward, by myself and with no one who could give me any answers as to what had just happened.

The doctors who came to give me a debrief came at about 4am (2 hours after I had woken up from surgery, after no sleep and as I'm trying to wrap my head around a new baby. I tell them how's not the time. The only other time someone came to me to give me the debrief again was the next morning, I was woken at 5am for them to try and have this talk with me. I had been asleep for an hour when they'd woke me up, so I was not in the right place to be having a talk and finding out what had happened. They told me that was the only time they could talk to me.

My whole stay at this hospital was a shambles. Most things had not been explained. I was told by the doctors I only lost 500ml of blood, and it was common to lose about a litre, but the day after the surgery I had a doctor come and tell me I needed a blood transfusion because I'd lost so much blood. I took my first shower myself, I had to call the nurse in afterwards because I couldn't bend down to dry my legs, but that was all the help I had gotten. I was given a script for an iron infusion without being told how/where I get an infusion from. I had nurses shoving my boob in my babies mouth so forcefully it hurt. They didn't really show/explain anything about breastfeeding, they just did it for me. When I was discharged, I was told to take Panadol for pain relief and was looked at like a junkie when I asked if she was serious. The whole discharge process was super rushed. I left the hospital feeling so traumatised and unsupported. When the home midwife came to check on me and baby the next day, I talked

to her about what had happened and she was horrified. She actually called the hospital to tell them I was coming back and that I needed to be discharged properly.

I still strongly believe that I wasn't ready to give birth that day. Had they left me a little longer I would have been able to do what my body needed and not left feeling traumatised. I believe they wanted me to gove birth because I was taking up a bed (despite me asking if I could go home until I was labouring). I believe they needed a bed in the birthing suite and that's why they pushed for a caesarean. Either that, or they didn't want to wait for my body to do what it needed. I believe this could have all been avoided if I was more informed about my rights as the birthing woman, and my ability to challenge what the doctors were saying.

I'm due to give birth to my second in less than 2 months and I'm so anxious about going back to this hospital. This hospital has also done nothing to better support me this time around, knowing that my last experience was so traumatic. I am glad this time I know my rights a little better ma do know the doctors can't push me into doing what they want me to do.

I have also heard from a few local mums that they'd had a similar experience with doctors at this hospital and they were also pushed into caesareans they probably could have avoided, so this isn't an isolated experience.