

Submission  
No 801

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Mrs Hannah Palmer

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Partially  
Confidential

In 2019 I birthed my first baby at \_\_\_\_\_ Health. At the time, I thought his birth was normal and that's just how birth happened. However I have since learnt that it doesn't have to be.

My husband and I participated in birth preparation classes at the hospital, these were largely around what pain medications could be used and what would happen if things weren't progressing in line with hospital policy. There was minimal information around what an uninterrupted physiological spontaneous labour could look like.

When prelabour started, I spent time at home, as time went on I thought labour was progressing. After 24 hours we went to the birth hospital- 50 minutes away, to be told, you're still in prelabour, but your blood pressures a bit high. We will give you a stretch and sweep and you can go home. No information was given to the risks around stretch and sweeps or the fact that they can lengthen pre-labour. We went home, hoping that as per the doctor, it would help things move quicker. Things stayed much the same for the next 8 hours, when we went back to hospital. The stretch and sweep didn't progress anything. They admitted us this time, from that point there were internal vaginal examinations performed every two hours, after 6 hours my waters were broken, which didn't progress labour. Another 6 hours they started oxytocin, which brought labour on hard and fast. It was not a nice experience, one that I have no desire to experience again. During this time; there were multiple discussions between the midwives that maybe an epidural and emergency cesarean might be necessary. This was not what I wanted. I'm thankful my husband was able to advocate for me to stop that happening.

After 4 1/2 hours, I was coached to start pushing. Pushing lasted an hour and a half. When my baby was born, we had a short amount of skin to skin time, before he was taken NICU due to concerns about breathing. During his time in NICU, he was diagnosed with Developmental Hip Dysplasia (we was put in a Pavlik Harness the next day). Thankfully he only had a short stay in NICU.

3 days after birth, when we were preparing to be discharged, my baby was weighed, he had dropped more weight than was desired. The recommendation was to up feeds to 3 hourly, and see what happened. For the next 24hr hrs, we fed for an hour every three hours. The two hours between he would scream. I remember having 4 midwives in my room, all doing their best to help, suggesting latch positions and things to try, while he lay there screaming. When he was weighed the next day, he had dropped more weight. At that point it was suggested we top him up some formula, but that it may impact breast feeding. He drank the formula and went to sleep settled. We were then put on 3 hour feeds- with a formula feed after, then pumping after that. The hospital didn't allow for partners to stay overnight. It was a long 2 days before he had gained enough weight to be discharged. From then we had biweekly visits to lactation consultants and child maternal health nurses to check his weight. I had the occasional mental health screen performed and the stickers from the second degree tear checked a couple of times. Everything was focused on the baby and his well-being with nothing acknowledging the enormity of what I had been through.

I didn't realise the immensity and the trauma around the first week of my sons life until I fell pregnant with my second baby in 2021.

A whole lot of feelings that hadn't been dealt with resurfaced and sent me looking for information and resources to reduce the chance of having a similar experience again.

I knew that my body was capable of birthing a baby without intervention and I made sure I was equipped with the knowledge and preparation to do so with a birth plan to explain this and a cheat sheet for my husband so he could easily advocate for what I wanted.

When my second labour started I felt confident to trust my body knew what it needed to do. When we went to hospital in established labour the midwife that was on shift was beautiful. She read my birth preferences and had them next to her desk for the duration of my labour. There were no interval vaginal examinations done. The only suggestions that she made were those of position support as baby was posterior. She allowed me to trust my body and allow me to follow what it need. I pushed when the feral ejection reflex kicked in, with her doing nothing but support. My baby was born as my waters broke 3 hours after arriving to hospital. Intervention free.

I am thankful for the midwives that were on shift during both my births. They were encouraging and supportive. They did their best within the hospital regulations. But they can only do better when they know better and are able to put current up to date evidence based practice in place. Sadly it doesn't seem this is always the case.

I think one thing that stood out from both by birth experience- both with trauma and without it, is the lack of postpartum care for mothers. The focus immediately shifted to the baby. A depression screen and tearing check up from a virtual stranger forms the basis of postpartum care. It fails to acknowledge the enormous change the birthing mother has just gone through. Doesn't allow her space with someone she trusts to feel what she needs. Doesn't consider her pelvic floor health, that to do anything about is on her, with hundreds if not thousands of dollars of outlay.

When we know better we do better. I hope the maternity system can do this one day soon.