

Submission
No 808

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Kate Kovic

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Partially
Confidential

I was admitted to _____ Hospital in Sydney in 2017 at 41 weeks pregnant with my first baby while in a painful labour. While intense pain began at 10pm that night it wasn't until 5:00am that _____ agreed that I should come in. I was told to "just take a Panadol". Labour continued for a further 23 hours. I was under the care of a private obstetrician who only managed to see me briefly twice during this time. Her instructions to the midwives were not clear and they did not follow her medical advice. When she finally managed to make it to my room during the final stages of pushing, a sense of confusion clouded the whole room while midwives scrambled to make sense of her frustration over the earlier miscommunication. As a result of the inaction forceps had to be used.

My baby was healthy but I suffered severe tearing and lost 499 ml of blood, a number that I believe to be somewhat convenient for my flailing obstetrician, a mere 1ml short of a postpartum haemorrhage. This figure was only disclosed 3 years later during a psych appointment at the same hospital while pregnant with my second child. I was not made aware of the extent of the tear or in fact why it took so long to sew me back up. I remember lying in the stirrups for over an hour while she silently sewed and not once did she or anyone else communicate to me what was happening.

Once the obstetrician had left the midwife assisted me to stagger to the bathroom and I was hosed down. There was a lot of blood on the bathroom floor. I spent 3 days in hospital and once discharged I quickly succumbed to a vaginal infection. I remember wearing underpants in the shower for over a week as I was worried about staining the bathroom tiles with the continued blood loss. Only once during those three days did my obstetrician visit and that was to inform me she was taking a vacation. At my six week check I was told by the same obstetrician that the reason behind the slow labour and use of forceps and tear was my "choice to have an epidural".

I was solely blamed for the traumatic events while only six week's postpartum. The trauma endured as I experienced frequent and severe panic attacks during my second pregnancy and was soon diagnosed with perinatal anxiety and depression. The panic attacks were directly linked to "birth anxiety". The trauma of my first birth most likely delayed the conception of my second child. It led to severe anxiety over 9 months of my second pregnancy. I needed to not only see a private psychologist but it was also recommended I see a public perinatal psychologist who could work through the birth trauma. For the first 5 years my sons birthday was not a time of celebration for me. Those hours of his birth replay in my mind every year and I struggle to move past the trauma of March 7 2017.