

Submission
No 822

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Genevieve Wood

Date Received: 6 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I am a woman, wife, mother of 2, and midwife. I am writing to share my personal experience of inappropriate and disrespectful care that I was subjected to by 2 NSW Ambulance paramedics following the birth of my daughter at home in 2016, and the subsequent need to transfer to hospital due to retained placenta and significant PPH. I hope that by sharing my story we can begin to address the underlying issues, training, cultural beliefs and practices that so often lead to the disrespectful and traumatising treatment of birthing women and their families, within and outside of our mainstream health care systems. Working as a midwife within the public hospital system, I sadly witness this inappropriate treatment and the lasting effect it has on women and their families. It has to stop.

In what was an otherwise positive birth experience including the compassionate treatment from the hospital staff upon arrival, the ambulance transfer was traumatic and has dominated my memory of my daughter's birth 7 years ago. Not only was this experience deeply traumatising for me, but also for my husband, mother in law, and friends who were present to support me for the birth.

To avoid rehashing my anger and distress relating to this entirely unnecessary experience, I have included my official complaint below that was lodged to NSW Ambulance in May 2016, 4 weeks after the birth of my baby.

Patient name: Genevieve Evelyn Wood (recorded at the time as Jane Wood)

Date of birth: 01/09/80

Date and time of incident: 19/04/16, approx 5.30pm

Address of incident:

Hospital destination: Hospital

On 4.23pm on the 19th April 2016, I gave birth to my daughter at home, as planned, under the expert care of a registered and Medicare-eligible privately practising midwife,

. I am a healthy 35 year old woman, had a low-risk pregnancy, and this was my second baby. I am also a student midwife and am fully informed about the benefits and risks of birthing at home vs hospital. I had booked into Hospital maternity in case there was a need to transfer, and they were fully aware and supportive of my plan to birth at home. I went into spontaneous labour at 41 weeks around 12.30pm on 19th April, and quickly progressed to a normal birth of a healthy baby. Approx 20 mins later as I was birthing the placenta, I began to haemorrhage. The situation was managed calmly and appropriately with the midwife administering intramuscular oxytocic medication and undertaking controlled cord traction (as per standard practice) to remove the placenta. Unfortunately the cord snapped leaving the placenta in situ and the decision was made to transfer to hospital for manual removal of the placenta and for management in case of further blood loss. At this stage it was estimated that I had lost approximately 1500mL of blood however my vital signs were stable. The paramedics were called to assist with the transfer.

On their arrival, a friend (by chance a medical registrar) met them at the curb and gave a detailed handover, of which they were entirely dismissive and actually stated, "well if you're a doctor, why are we here then?". When they entered the house, they were extremely rude, judgemental and did not appear to understand the situation or the need for urgency, nor did they appear willing to help. In fact they stood, arms crossed, by the door, rolled their eyes and muttered something about whether they should call the 'inspector'. They did not address me personally and took some time before they actually came over to where I was lying to assess me. You might appreciate how stressful this was for me to experience this utterly inappropriate lack of care and disrespect, given my understanding of postpartum haemorrhage, and my concern that my condition may rapidly deteriorate. I distinctly remember thinking in that moment, "this is where it all goes wrong". It was clear that their judgement of the situation, however uneducated and ill informed, was completely affecting their duty of care and making an otherwise well managed situation, potentially dangerous.

Their dangerous practice continued with their refusal to insert a second IV cannula (as requested by the midwife and noted as standard practice), refusing to run fluids through the IV cannula that had already been inserted by my midwife, their refusal to help move me onto the trolley despite having full access from the entrance to where I lay in the lounge room, insisting the trolley was unable to go up stairs (of which we have only 2 at the front door), and forcing my family members to drag me on a mattress onto the front porch (in broad daylight, semi-naked and bleeding), expecting me to stand up and move myself onto the trolley. This in itself was utterly degrading, confusing, dangerous and entirely unnecessary. My midwife had to say to them, "just treat her as if she's been stabbed". Their lack of care continued in the ambulance with the paramedics responding rudely to the midwife's requests to use the siren to expedite the journey (through peak hour traffic) with their response "well that will be at our discretion", their lack of communication or reassurance with me and generally rude and disapproving demeanour. The paramedic riding in the back with me would not make eye contact and I had to put my hand on him and plead "please don't treat me like this, I haven't done anything wrong". I was in excruciating pain with my placenta in situ and having had syntocinon and ergometrine yet was never offered pain relief. They even commented to each other, as they were taking me into the hospital that "lets see what the doctors have to say about this" as if the hospital staff would have the same view. If only they had stayed long enough to witness the compassionate and respectful care that we received from the attending obstetrician and midwives at Hospital.

I hope you can appreciate my disappointment and anger at the inexcusable treatment we received from the 2 attending paramedics. I have many questions which I have gone over many times in my mind, trying to make sense of what happened. The actions of your paramedics have significantly impacted on me and my family in such a vulnerable time. I have never felt so judged or degraded in my life. Please bear in mind, I had just given birth to my daughter and this should have been a time of celebration and joy.

If anything positive can come from this experience, it would be to know that all paramedics are receiving more appropriate education and training in relation to the safety of homebirth and the clinical care required in the case of postpartum haemorrhage or fetal respiratory

distress (the 2 main reasons, albeit rare, for homebirth transfer). And most importantly that there is education to ensure that every health care professional in this country understands that WOMEN HAVE HUMAN RIGHTS, the right to bodily autonomy, informed choice and the freedom to accept or decline any care relating to them and their unborn baby. I see this as the fundamental issue that blurs the lines and results in health care professionals thinking that they know better and going against the woman's own judgement and decision making.