

Submission  
No 903

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Mrs Alicia Woodfield

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Partially  
Confidential

# Submission in relation to the inquiry on birth trauma

Dear Select Committee on Birth Trauma,

My name is Alicia Woodfield, I am 30 years old and live in \_\_\_\_\_, New South Wales. I live with my husband, Paul and almost 19 month old son, \_\_\_\_\_ and am currently 30 weeks pregnant with our second child.

I am submitting this submission to provide some insight on birth trauma and how it has personally impacted me. I am hopeful my submission will go toward change and be used to better support women that experience birth trauma.

In short, I gave birth at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital on 14 January 2022 and had an extremely traumatic birth experience. I am currently undergoing therapy to help me through my current pregnancy as I have been diagnosed with PTSD from my last birth. I have summarised my experience below and provided some points on what change I would like to see.

## **1. Antenatal care**

Initially, the care I received at the beginning of my first pregnancy at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital was great. I was treated as a high risk patient from the very beginning as I have a genetic heart condition. Therefore, I seen the same high risk midwife throughout my pregnancy.

It is important to note, that my heart condition has not given me any issues and is controlled by medication and a healthy lifestyle. Other than me having this pre-existing condition my pregnancy had no complications at all. I attended an appointment with \_\_\_\_\_ early in my pregnancy and was advised that despite having my heart condition, I was allowed to have a natural birth with a few extra precautions put in place. One being, ideally I could not push for more than one hour.

My antenatal care diminished when I was 40 weeks and 5 days pregnant. It was a Wednesday and all of a sudden I was told that I needed to be induced. I was told it needed to happen as soon as possible and needed to happen on a weekday as they required adequate doctors present due to my heart condition. I was sent home from this appointment with no further detail as to what was happening as the birthing unit advised my midwife they had no room for me.

At this point I was quite distressed and worried that I was not going to receive adequate care to deliver my baby. That afternoon, I lodged a complaint with the \_\_\_\_\_ Local Health District about what was happening. I received a phone call within 20 minutes off a lady who consoled me and assured me she would have this sorted out within a few hours. A few hours later I was advised to go to \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital the following day to be induced. Whilst the induction process was explained to

me it was the first time I was hearing of it. This was over the phone and whilst already distressed from what had just transpired.

## 2. Birth experience

Being induced is where all my main trauma began. My waters were broken on the Friday at about 10am and I was given the drip to induce labour. Despite not really wanting to be induced, I was convinced it was the right thing to do. At no point was I advised that due to my heart condition, I was only allowed to be on the drip for a certain period of time.

Contractions started and instantly I was having 5 contractions within 10 minutes. I was managing the contractions fairly well. My husband and I created a relaxing environment knowing that the coming moments were going to change our lives forever.

After about 2 hours I was told by the midwife at the birthing unit that the anaesthetist would prefer to give me an epidural early if possible. At this point I said no, I am managing this well. An hour later, the midwife again returned asking if I was ready for an epidural. I felt pressured and gave in. Two epidurals later, I was bed bound.

About an hour after receiving the epidural, my sons heart rate started to drop. A Doctor then came into the room and said, “no more eating or drinking, if I didn’t dilate any further I would need a c-section.” I was completely distraught. One hour later and I had dilated one extra centimetre, yet the Doctor was not satisfied and said I needed a c-section. It was at this point I was told that due to my heart condition, I could only be on the induction drug for a certain period of time. This was never ever communicated to me. If I knew that was the case I would have **never** agreed to be induced.

I was inconsolable. This was not what I envisioned. I had a young midwife come in and talk to me about c-sections and what the process was. Whilst this did help, the doctor proceeded to enter the room and state “even if you had a natural birth you would likely need forceps to deliver as you can only push for an hour”. This statement is forever embedded in my mind and scares me when I think about giving birth this second time.

Eventually, I caved and agreed to the c-section. I remember being wheeled down the corridor crying my absolute eyes out.

I was then taken to an anaesthetic room before theatre and advised I needed to have some sort of monitoring device inserted into my artery due to my heart condition. I agreed, however indicated I would only allow one attempt at something so invasive. My husband watched the entire thing unfold and then miss my vein and seen wire practically go up my entire forearm. I then advised them to stop.

In addition to this, my epidural was wearing off and I required a spinal needle to ensure I did not feel the surgery. At this point I was going in and out of consciousness as I was utterly exhausted. I missed

the first moments of my son being born and was denied the opportunity to have him placed on my chest straight away.

### **3. Post-natal**

Despite this horrific experience, I was looked after by some incredible midwives and nurses in the maternity ward.

My experience of the above left me completely traumatised. I came home from hospital and would constantly cry and replay my experience in my head. My husband did not know what to do. It was the community nurse who then organised a counsellor for me. I used a counsellor for months after birth and whilst this did help, it was not until I met with a head midwife / psychologist from hospital for a birthing debrief that I was able to move on. During the debrief I was actually told my sons umbilical cord was wrapped around his head twice which was impacting him from descending. If this was communicated to me at the time, it could have saved me months of mental health issues.

Fast forward to the present day and my trauma has resurfaced. I am extremely anxious about giving birth again and despite expressing my mental health concerns, I still feel like I am not being heard by Hospital. This time around I do not have the same high risk midwife. Instead I am being palmed off to Doctors.

I have sought help from a therapist through the Gidget Foundation who is helping me through everything. I am still unsure how I am going to mentally survive this next birth and it petrifies me.

### **4. Change**

Change is definitely needed in the birthing space.

In summary:

- I believe all care should be led by midwives;
- Women should have the same midwife throughout their pregnancy as continuity of care in my opinion is essential;
- Women should be told of the risks associated with being induced to allow them to make an informed decision;
- Doctors need to be trained on how to be empathetic;
- There needs to be a body specifically designed to help with birth trauma;
- There needs to be more awareness around birth trauma which will hopefully change how doctors and midwives deal with women giving birth; and
- Hospitals should have a dedicated psychologist to do birthing debriefs with women who experience birth trauma.

I really hope something comes of this inquiry and my submission assists in some positive change.

Kind regards,

Alicia Woodfield