

Submission
No 1046

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Sam Sunderland

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Sam Sunderland. I am 33 years old and live in NSW. I have two children; a 2.5yr old and a 7 month old. Both times I gave birth in Public Hospital under the care of the antenatal unit after missing a spot in our MGP due to limited spots.

My first pregnancy and birth happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant I did not see a health professional face to face until I was 30 weeks pregnant. I was diagnosed with HG late in my pregnancy and as a result of this lost 10kg in my first two trimesters. At my 36 week clinic appointment, I was told I had high bile acid levels in my bloods (with no explanation of what this meant) and sent home with instructions to get weekly blood tests to monitor these. At my 39 week clinic appointment, I was rudely told I should have been induced at 37 weeks and questioned as to why I wasn't. I was given a vaginal examination without informed consent which caused significant pain and bleeding. I was then sent home to pack and return the next day for induction. I was given little information about what this would involve.

During my labour, I was given six more painful vaginal examinations, eventually having to aggressively refuse further examinations despite coercion by on call obstetricians.

After a long labour I eventually required a C-section. After my c-section, I was separated from my husband and baby for 2 hours and left alone in recovery.

For my second birth, I again applied for our local MGP but was again unsuccessful so was under the care of the antenatal unit again. I went into this birth much more educated and aware of my rights as a birthing woman in a hospital. At each antenatal appointment (bar one) I was told that my decision for a vaginal birth was risky and unlikely to eventuate, which I knew was not evidence based advice. At each appointment after 30 weeks I was encouraged to book an day for my induction or caesarean section. I respectfully declined on each occasion. As I got closer to 40 weeks, these encouragements became more forceful and each time I declined I was made to feel I was putting my baby at risk, which I knew to be untrue. I presented to the birth unit in spontaneous labour and had to repeatedly decline vaginal examinations to "check" me. After 24hrs of labouring, I received two painful and coerced vaginal examinations that caused me significant emotional trauma. I was made to feel like I was being difficult and was so exhausted that I gave in. I again ended up with a caesarean section that I feel may have been avoidable if I had felt safe in my birth space. I lost consciousness during my surgery and woke in recovery without my husband or baby, not knowing if they were safe. I am still working through the psychological trauma and guilt from this.

I do not believe I was given evidence based, unbiased information about my births for either of my births. I am a well educated physiotherapist, now working in the women's health space and I still was coerced and bullied into making specific decisions that benefited the hospital and its staff rather than me or my baby. I hope that no other woman has to go through this and I will continue to empower my friends, family and clients to educate and inform themselves rather than rely on our broken birthing system.