

Submission
No 921

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

Hi there,

I would like to share my story in hope that it can change our healthcare system and provide support and resources to healthcare workers caring for new mothers.

My name is Melanie, I gave birth to my son [redacted] 18/05/22 at [redacted] Hospital. It was quite the journey. I will start at the start.

On 14th May (the day before his due date) I felt back pain and early labour symptoms. Despite the discomfort I was thrilled my baby boy was getting ready to enter the world. My early labour symptoms carried on to the next day and then things started to progress.

Unfortunately, my partner Vitor ([redacted] father) tested positive to Covid that morning. I tested negative. We called the hospital to inform them and were told that Vitor would not be able to attend the birth. I was devastated. This shock and worry was the last thing I needed.

We passed this news onto my student midwife, [redacted]. She rang around and found that Vitor could in fact attend the birth. The hours of worrying and time spent on the phone to family (who are all interstate) was such a stressful way to experience labour.

My contractions got closer and were significantly more painful. It was time to go to the hospital. We called ahead to let them know we were arriving. As Vitor had Covid we had to enter through a basement parking area and be escorted in by hospital staff. Again, a stressful experience when in labour. Unfortunately, I was only 1cm dilated. We stayed the night then were sent home with Panadeine Forte.

We returned to the hospital the next day when my contractions were consistently 5 mins apart. We experienced the same distress entering the hospital. I was waiting at the top of the ramp (with the boom gate) for someone to collect us. I was in severe labour pain. Vitor ran to the ambulance area trying to get someone to help us even though we had called. It was dark, cold, and I felt helpless.

My birth was complicated. I was 1-2 cm dilated for a long time. I got covid on my second day of labour and really struggled. I ended up having 'the cascade of interventions' as they say. I had tried the nitrous oxide but couldn't breathe properly due to covid. I was given morphine to get sleep. Then water injections, and eventually an induction via oxytocin, this progressed slowly. I was exhausted. I was finding it so hard to breathe and couldn't stop coughing. I felt like [redacted] bones were smashing into my bones, like his head was hitting my tail bone. I think he was posterior. I was given an epidural some time on Tuesday afternoon. The doctor broke my waters. I required an episiotomy and [redacted] was born vaginally with use of the vacuum.

The birthing team were wonderful, they communicated well even in their PPE gear. Although my birth was difficult, it is the poor level of care I received afterward that has deeply troubled me.

When we left the birthing suite to go to WCU we were told Vitor was not allowed to come as he had Covid. We were so confused as I also had Covid and we would both be in isolation. There was no reason for him not to stay with me. It went downhill from there.

I was so unwell after the birth. I had lost blood, was freezing, alone and completely depleted. I had this beautiful baby boy to care for but no one to care for me. My milk didn't come in. I struggled to breastfeed. I pressed the buzzer often to ask for help but the person would need to

get into their gear each time and they were always rushing. It wasn't a very nurturing experience. I couldn't think properly, I was bleeding so much and everything hurt.

I tried expressing colostrum by hand but not much was coming out.

I tried to snuggle with [redacted] and feed, feed, feed. But nothing came. I thought I must be doing it wrong but it was difficult getting help. The nurses seemed like they were so understaffed. They would come and check on us but then had to keep going to other Mums. I needed someone to be with me. I needed love.

My room was next to the birthing suites. I could hear constant loud banging of the door as people went in and out. And the rustling of PPE being put on before anyone came into my room. Often things were left outside my room, and they didn't come in at all. Like meals, Panadol, and even heat packs when I had asked for them because I was so cold.

On day 5 [redacted] was found to be underweight. Formula was introduced and a strict feeding plan. I feel so awful and so guilty that this happened. It breaks my heart that I couldn't feed him properly and he wasn't given formula soon enough. I wasn't well enough to think clearly, and I had no one to advocate for me. But I'm his Mum, he needed more from me. And I don't think I will ever be ok with this.

He regained weight and we were allowed to go home where we continued the feeding plan (breastfeed, express, formula). I was also on Domperidone at this point. We returned 2 days later via emergency as [redacted] was sleepy and had stopped feeding. He had caught a bug in the hospital from the bath. It was a UTI called Pseomonous. He was poked and prodded with cannulas and catheters. I will never get this image out of my mind. It was so hard for the doctors to find his tiny little veins. He was given antibiotics and had a feeding tube.

Once [redacted] was well, we left the kids ward and came home. We continued our feeding plan and the rest of the antibiotics. I struggled to feed over the following months and mixed fed for four months until he refused the breast entirely. I will never know if this is because of our birth and how unwell I was afterward. But I truly believe it is all so connected. My support was taken away from me and the staff were too busy to give me the proper care I needed.