

Submission
No 922

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My partner and I live in [redacted] NSW and had our first baby two years ago in March 2021 at our local hospital, [redacted] Hospital.

Becoming pregnant was a three-year IVF journey for us at two separate IVF clinics in Sydney. I underwent four IUI's, two egg retrievals, one D&C and five FET's to finally get my little miracle. During this time, I interacted with many professionals and became very used to internal exams and nurses or OBGYN's talking to me about what is happening. Throughout this process, I felt safe and supported by my medical team.

During my pregnancy, I was listed as high risk due to my pregnancy being through IVF means, my age at 35 years, and my weight. I also had some scares such as a large bleed, which resulted in me having to undergo a high-risk ultrasound at 12 weeks. Mild HG resulting in a 15kg weight loss, continued nausea, vomiting, and knowing my baby was breech until 39 weeks and 4 days. However, I was happy because I was pregnant.

Due to covid and not having private health insurance I ended up in a shared care midwife and GP situation. I was seeing two midwives and a GP I was unfamiliar with, but who was willing to bulk bill. I saw Dr [redacted] twice through my pregnancy then at 39 weeks she left and I was given to Dr [redacted]. During my time under Dr [redacted] she advised she would be inducing me as it would not be safe for me to progress past 40 weeks. When I asked why, I was told because I was pregnant through IVF means and a high-risk. I was told I would be sent through to [redacted] high-risk clinic, however this never happened.

I met Dr [redacted] at 39 weeks and she also advised an induction was safest. I was not keen but agreed to a stretch and sweep at 39+5.

Covid meant I was forced to go alone and unsupported to all my appointments with the midwives and I was also unable to attend face to face birthing classes. However, I did attend the [redacted] health class on line, which I felt was a total waste of time being so generalised. During the class, the nurse spoke down about pain relief and advised its best only used as a last resort. When I tried to get more information around pain relief, I was shut down and my questions went unanswered.

My waters broke at home around 1 pm in the afternoon and I was 39+5 weeks. Due to this I never underwent the stretch and sweep scheduled by Dr [redacted]. I ended up attending my local birth ward at 4pm and was concerned, as I had not felt any movement since my waters had broken.

From the moment I walked into the birthing ward I felt unwelcome and was made to feel like I was wasting their time. They questioned me around my waters breaking and from their questions I was not 100% sure if my water had actually broken. They refused to do an internal exam but they did check bub, as I still could not feel her moving, however they advised she was ok and that the pain I was currently experiencing was not contractions. I was not allowed to leave the hospital but I could not stay in the birth suite as they advised I would not have my baby "*any time soon*". At this time, I advised very strongly I wanted all pain relief options, and was told "*it's way too early to discuss those*".

I was sent to the ward, where I was given a single room. I continued to experience pain which had now localised in my lower back. The midwives would come and check on me sporadically, however these checks consisted of the midwife placing her hand on my belly then declaring I was not having a contraction. During these checks, I continued to ask about pain relief and was continually told "*it's noted*" and I would need to be administered the pain relief in the birthing suit.

After checking my ketones, I was given a bag of fluids, however I couldn't rest and was up walking and taking lots of showers. During this, the nurses got my partner a chair and stated it would be tomorrow when I had my baby so we should both rest.

At 930pm another external hand on belly check (no monitor for baby used) and I was experiencing strong pain. When I informed the midwife of my pain and that I had been timing my contractions I was dismissed by the midwife and told to rest and advised *"this baby isn't coming tonight"*. I was then given two endone to help me rest. Less than an hour later, I told my midwife the pain was so bad every 5 minutes and I couldn't lay down due to the pain, I was advised the endone would help. There was no baby monitoring except the hand on the belly since I was sent out of the birth suite.

By 11pm I had not slept at all, I was getting no rest, we had the contractions timed at 4 minutes apart for almost a minute. The midwives stated I was not even close to having the baby and to rest. No one suggested anything for pain management and just left us alone in our room.

Before midnight, I was told if I wanted pain relief I would have to go over to the birth suite. I met who would be my midwife and the night supervisor. Being covid I was told no bath or equipment could be used in the birthing suite. They got me to lay down to check my baby on the monitor. I advised them I felt like I was in labour. checked my cervix and noted I was almost 10cms so it was *"too late"* for an epidural. This really annoyed me since I had made it clear I wanted an epidural since I arrived and had stated it at every observation check, I felt manipulated out of my choice of pain relief.

I ended up having to use gas as my pain relief, however I observed turning down the gas flow throughout my labour as she felt I was using it to much.

encouraged me to start pushing before 1am, I didn't want to be on my back as it really hurt but that was the only way the monitor for the baby would work. From 1am to 4am she kept the gas turned low and told me to use it sparingly, (supervisor) stated if the gas stopped me pushing they would turn it off. By 4am I was exhausted and the endone had me feeling groggy, I was so tired from pushing. appeared and stated to I was being *"lazy"* and needed to push better. My partner tried to motivate me but I was just so tired.

During this time, I was given a second bag of fluids and was told this would help. No one explained it was Pitocin, advised of the risks or asked for my consent!

By 5am I had nothing left in the tank, I was exhausted and constantly being told to be on my back even though I kept saying it hurt which frustrated me to tears. I have never cried so much and pushing for over 4 hours was too much.

My partner was getting very anxious and the midwives ignored our clear distress and didn't offer us any options or support. stated I was being lazy and left the room again. had looked to her for guidance through the night and had not given her any help from our perspective.

The OBGYN was finally called, it was Dr . It was obvious the Dr was annoyed at having been called in early and made no attempt to hide the fact she was frustrated. At no time did the Dr or midwives gain my consent for interventions or inform me of their plan to birth the baby.

At 615am I was given an episiotomy, I didn't consent to this and no local pain relief or warning was given. I screamed it hurt so much and she just told me to push as my baby was coming. My baby girl was born at 625am.

Dr _____ then cut the cord so quick, which I didn't want and again, no one asked for my consent. The pulling of my placenta hurt and I was given nothing for the pain. I held my baby while she tried to stitch me up, and when I advised it hurt, Dr _____ did not acknowledge me or my pain. During this time, I noticed something on the table behind her and asked a day shift midwife what it was, she advised it was the vacuum. This was terrifying since no one had discussed this with me or even asked my consent.

After this ordeal my partner was told she was not allowed to stay and had to leave, I did not want her to go as she was my only support. As my partner walked past the nurse's station she overheard the supervisor and the midwives say "*she got a live birth what's she crying about*".

After the birth I was struggling to get my baby to breastfeed. The day midwives told me I could see the IBCLC on Tuesday, but had to remain in the hospital until then. Each midwife that came to my room helped me breastfeed every 2 hours, then at night they milked some colostrum and took my baby so I could rest. I didn't rest though I just laid there replaying the birth in my head and crying.

On Monday morning I asked for my stitches from the episiotomy to be checked as I was experiencing excruciating pain and pulling in that area. I was advised by the midwife that everything look "*normal*" and that it was normal for discomfort and I would heal fine. I was advised to continue to take Panadol for the pain and apply ice packs. However, the pain made me feel sick and sitting or walking became difficult.

Come Tuesday the IBCLC was changed to an on-line appointment due to covid. I was so disappointed as I knew she was present in the ward but could not actually come and see me. However, given my struggles with breastfeeding She did come by and show me how to use a nipple shield.

Tuesday night a midwife continually opened my room door when I was asleep. I thought I was going crazy. I would close the door and she would open it again after I was back in bed. I had my door closed as it was loud near the nurse station and I could not sleep. They were having a quiet night with lots of laughter, which is why I was trying to close the door. I left Wednesday sleep deprived, confused and sure my stitches should not cause this much pain when I sit or stand. No one told me I could come back to the hospital if I was having difficulty with anything once home.

Once I was home the midwives came to the house twice as my baby had lost more than 10% of her weight after her birth. During these visits I asked for my stiches to be checked as I was still experiencing pain and was advised they were "*fine*".

I went to my two-week GP check-up and once again asked for my stiches to be check and was told they were fine. At this point I felt unhurd and that my pain was not taken seriously. At 5 weeks PP I booked an appointment with a private women's physio as I could not stand the pain anymore. She advised my episiotomy wound was not healing and would require further action.

By 6 weeks PP I knew my stitches were wrong as there was visible damage to my perineum. I noted this to my GP at my six-week check-up who consulted with the hospital Obstetrics. It was recommended that I use lidocaine for two weeks and to come back if needed.

At 8 weeks PP I returned to the hospital about my stitchers. I was asked to wait in the birth suite where I became sweaty and started crying. When I was examined by the Dr he stated it would be a simple fix and could be done under a local anaesthetic that day. I had no idea how I would lay on that bed again. When the doctor left I kept crying, a midwife asked me what was wrong and I explained about my recent birthing experience. The nurse was very kind and advocated for me to have the procedure done under a general anaesthetic. The Dr agreed and the procedure to fix my stitches was booked for the

next day. The surgery went well and the difference of a decent stitch job was amazing, I had no pain and was able to walk normally again.

While this resolved my physical pain, I was still struggling mentally so sought information from the Austral Asian Birth Association who recommend accessing my birth notes. Upon receiving my notes, I was horrified to read such lies. Phrases like declined pain relief and active labour under 2 hours was completely untrue. I tried to book into the community health counselling program however the wait times and their stipulations for appointments made attending their services impossible. It was so hard carrying the trauma of my birth experience and dealing with a very dismissive system.

After two years, I tried going back to community counselling. However, my experience left me feeling just as hurt and dismissed as I was after my birth. Phrases like *"let it go"* and *"trust the system"* have brought the trauma back to the surface. I'm finding it difficult to trust a system that does not admit there is a problem within NSW health.

I have been contemplating a second pregnancy so reached out to the hospital to make a birth plan and to see what can be arranged to remove the risk of seeing [redacted] and Dr [redacted] again. I was advised I could attend [redacted] hospital which is a 64-kilometre drive from [redacted] or have a planned C section. While I understand c sections are lifesaving, I am against the idea for myself since the mess of an episiotomy and zero support I had previously received. Frankly, the public hospital does not seem to even consider midwife/OBGYN abuse to be real and I'm afraid if I have major surgery and no one listens, I will die before I can get anyone to believe me.

This experience of the public health system has affected every aspect of my life. I no longer trust any medical professionals and now need to take my partner to all my and our daughter's medical appointments so that I have a witness to what occurs as I don't feel my family is safe with NSW health. Being on a low income makes it hard to access weekly private counselling so I have been unable to get help for my trauma.

I've since learnt [redacted] Hospital brag they administer the least number of drugs in Maternity, saying it's all about support. I wish I could attend and explain it's because they just don't give them out when you ask/beg. They put you off then pretend there is no choice.

I did report my first birth experience, it was a pathetic exercise. Clearly more about covering the hospital than acknowledging a clear problem in the system. While I don't want my name public I am happy to discuss my experience or clarify anything needed to bring much needed change.

I might add the night I had my daughter, there was just two of us birthing in a ward staffed for four births, so even though poor staffing happens I do not believe this was an acceptable reason why I couldn't have any pain relief or a shower. Even covid stress does not excuse the lack of support or compassion I received.