

Submission
No 927

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

Birth story...

I was fortunate enough to be part of the continuity of care model at my local public hospital - . The was great as it meant that I had the same midwife for all appointments and 1 of 5 who I had met. All seemed lovely.

Skipping to the part where labour starts; my labour started spontaneously at home at about 4am with contractions. I thought it was just another day as I'd had these for a week or so around that time. Alas, these ones continued and they got stronger, come 4pm my waters broke. My husband came home to a calm environment and we started the 40min drive to the hospital.

We arrived about 5:30pm to me being fully effaced and 4cm. Now times get a bit hazy for me here but from paperwork I've reviewed they are pretty on par. From about 6pm I laboured and utilised the bath, shower and gas. At some point I did request a pain relief injection as I really wanted to avoid an epidural. At around 10:30pm my midwife told me I should get an epidural as I could sleep and this would help me for pushing. I agreed emotionally as I was tired. It was placed about 30-60min later.

The epidural stalled my labour at 9.5cm. I was at 9.5cm when they placed it, and had I had known that, I would have refused being so close. However, they checked dilation afterward. I then got a little bit of sleep.

The midwife came in about an hour later and checked me and said "you're still 9.5cm, if you don't advance in an hour it is a section." And left. I became so incredibly upset and stressed. She came back in shortly after and placed a peanut ball between my legs to help. When she came back she said "you're still 9.5cm, I'm going to try and have you push while I try to flip the cervix over the head" (which was like almost crowning at this point). She then said it hadn't worked and she sent for the theatre team and for me to be prepped. The entire time I was under the impression this had to happen and was an emergency. I didn't feel I could question it, as what mother wants to be viewed as putting their child at risk.

I was prepped and as I cried and signed paperwork the midwife tried flipping the lip again. I was taken to theatre absolutely shaking, petrified, crying and way too informed by my own reading on what could happen. I was told an hour and done, if be in the recovery and holding a baby.

I went in, still petrified and shaking, my husband freaked out by the state of me. They begin their preps in the theatre and the procedure. The whole time the curtain slipped repetitively and the doctors angled all the lights so no matter what I did I could see my insides (I dissect organs for a living and am not squeamish, but I DON'T want/need to see my insides). They were rough, there was so much pulling and tugging. I looked at my husband at one point and said "I can feel my feet". He took a second to process and said something to the team, who were like "nah". I repeated myself more fearfully and said "if it gets higher and I feel what they are doing I'll scream". The team gave me an epi top up. The shaking got worse (conveniently not mentioned as a side effect of epi) and I got more scared as to why I couldn't control my body.

I turned to my husband and asked why it was taking so long. I knew it had been more than an hour and my baby was not out yet.

I then heard the surgeon call for the more experienced surgeon. My heart sank. The surgeon never came.

The one I had made a call to extend my cut quite a number of cm up my side to enlarge the area to get baby out. It didn't in itself help. They had to push my daughter back through my vagina whilst pulling her arms to release her. They broke her arm, bruised her severely and by now, due to time and my stress- she was hypoxic and didn't make a sound. I cried more and asked why I couldn't hear my child. No one answered.

She was wheeled passed me, entirely covered, they quickly showed me and said "here's your baby girl, we're off to NICU" (I didn't know why at this stage). I stupidly asked how big she was and got "more than 4" as they exited.

Despite how clearly petrified I still was my husband had to go. They stitched me up and cleaned me - not really talking me through anything including rolling me around, and I felt like a slab of meat.

I then sat in "recovery", a place I was told I was going, but was just the theatre for a while, sobbing to myself and alone with one medical personnel. He did not once ask if I was okay, needed anything, or speak. It was cold and sterile.

I then went to the ward, where I was still upset and introduced to the nurses as the emergency section patient and they were told how bad my incision was. They seemed immediately sympathetic and told me they'd call NICU for my midwife and husband..

The call was never placed or never passed on to my husband on the other end.

I laid alone for about 90mins, crying and the only person to check on me was the room share patient I had. Whilst still alone and terrified, two nurses outside my door discussed the mum that had just arrived from theatre, an e-section, who had not yet been informed the baby had not made it. What was left of my heart shattered as I was the emergency patient, surely they were talking about me.

I waited along for what now felt like an eternity, building up in my head that my husband was downstairs somewhere overcome with grief and unsure how to face me.

A nurse appeared and said "oh has no one come to you yet?", I shook my head and she called (either again or for the first time). My husband appeared with my midwife about 10minutes later. My child, I was finally told by him, was resting somewhat peacefully in NICU.

The care on the ward from there was pretty standard and most of the team lovely. However, I am now pregnant again and regularly overcome by fear of these events repeating themselves. No one seems to understand why I am so against another section except my husband. I never want to be back there, helpless.

I have since, in many appointments been armed with information that my surgery was likely avoidable and that there were options I could have been afforded before that. I have also been made aware through my current pregnancy that my surgery was the lowest grade of "emergency", deemed as "if and when the mother and surgical team are ready".