

Submission
No 953

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth in August 2022, at . From 18 weeks gestation, my prenatal care was with . There was no continuity of care. I was a moderate risk pregnancy, and saw different doctors each prenatal appointment. From the beginning, I felt there was a lean towards intervention which worried me. Naturally, I was hoping for a uninterventional birth, however, I voiced the safety for my child and myself was my main priority, and wanted the care that was in our best interest.

Despite, being under the care of a private endocrinologist and the obstetric medical team, I often felt unsupported and lost in the process, feeling I was the one managing my own pregnancy and healthcare. At 30 weeks, I flagged down a nurse asking when I would be seen by a midwife, so I could run through some labour preparation questions. I also enquired when I would be offered a prenatal course placement. The words of the nurse struck me hard; Unfortunately, I was 'one of the patients who had fallen through the cracks'. I was left to privately seek a prenatal course and educate myself on what was ahead.

As my pregnancy progressed, I had an underlying concern regarding the large size of my daughters head which I often voiced. I was repeatedly told 'plenty of women birth big babies'. When I birthed, I was 35 years old. I had gestational diabetes and a large for gestational age fetus, whose head was off the scale, so to speak. Not once, was I educated on the risks of having a large baby. Nor was I ever given a choice of the different care options based on these risk factors. At 39 weeks, I was booked for an induction. I naturally went into labour after a stretch and sweep, and birth my baby the next morning in an uncomplicated vaginal birth. However, after the birth, I intrinsically knew something was wrong from the degree of swelling and discomfort I experienced, despite my grade 2 tear. I sustained a major irreversible pelvic floor injury where my muscles had been ripped from my bone (total right Levator Ani Avulsion and partial left Levator Ani Avulsion) and multiple prolapses. Due to multiple risk factors (maternal age, baby over 4kg, first born) I had an 80% chance of this injury occurring. The impact of this injury has been catastrophic. It has not only impacted my identity, but also emotionally, mentally, physically, sexually and even my relationships. It has also come with a huge financial burden, which has required me to seek private consultations with numerous specialists, GPs, woman health physios and psychologists.

My post birth experience has been traumatic, devastating, hard and lonely. Within the health care system, there is minimal help for woman post birth. I have had to seek help myself and find answers, which has been challenging in itself. I have often felt my birth injury has been dismissed by the doctors and specialists I have sort help from. Medicare offers little help financially, despite me now having a chronic health issue which I have to manage for the rest of my life.

It is time risk factors are openly discussed with woman prenatally. That women are given a choice in their care, based on these risk factors. And if injury still occurs, it's time the health care systems recognises these injuries, and provides health care and support in diagnosis, treatment and management of these injuries.