

Submission
No 956

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 8 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Select Committee,

My name is _____ and I gave birth to my son in 2021 at _____ Hospital.

While I had a reasonably uneventful pregnancy I found the shared care between my doctor and multiple midwives to be quite disjointed in preparing for birth. This being said, the midwives I saw during my pregnancy were excellent and I felt as though I could trust each of them should they be present during labour.

However when I presented to hospital in labour I was checked into the maternity ward by a midwife I had never met before and who had never seen me during my pregnancy or had reviewed my birth preferences. I found this to be distressing as there were no familiar faces that I trusted and I was in a great deal of pain.

During my labour I requested an epidural multiple times but was brushed off by this midwife. I was given gas and air which barely touched the sides of my pain.

When I again requested more pain relief I was told it was too late for morphine and so I asked for an epidural. The midwife said she would check with the doctor and came back and said I could have a lower dose of morphine instead. I got the impression that it was too much trouble at that early hour of the morning to call an anaesthetist and I felt as though I was a nuisance as they would have to call a doctor to come in. I deeply regret not advocating for myself in this situation but at the time I couldn't even speak I was in so much pain. I feel as though my body almost went into shock due to the extreme amount of pain and I could not focus properly to do what I needed to do to try and deliver vaginally.

When I was 3cm and 7cms dilated the same midwife performed vaginal examinations on me. She did not receive my informed consent for these procedures and I was told that I didn't have a choice - I did not know that I had the right to refuse it and have since learnt that there are other ways of checking how advanced in labour someone is without doing this procedure. The way she performed the examinations was, in my words, obstetric violence. While she was performing the second examination, she broke my forewaters which added substantially to the pain. She was so rough during the procedure and I felt as though I had been assaulted and as though I had no agency over my body.

I still feel so much anxiety and sadness over this part of my labour 19 months on and it has deeply affected my life in many ways. I suffered post natal depression and anxiety in those first few months postpartum and I really cannot express how dark that period of time was and how much I feel like I failed my son because I was not able to be the strong and mentally stable mother I had hoped to be. As a result, I missed a lot during those early newborn months and unfortunately it is time I will never get back. Additionally, I have struggled to be intimate with my husband as a result of this trauma during my birth. I am also due for routine cervical screening which I have been putting off due to not wanting to be in a vulnerable position where I could be hurt by a medical professional in this way again. I have always wanted to have more children but after this experience I can say I have no desire to for fear of being in a situation where my pain is not adequately managed and my body is violated again.

Two days after my son was born I had to be examined internally by an attending doctor to check everything was ok. I was taken to the same room I laboured in and examined on the same bed which was incredibly traumatic and I felt as though I was reliving parts of my labour I would rather forget.

The lack of appropriate pain relief and lack of respect for my body during labour was something I will never forget and still struggle to process. Unfortunately, It has coloured my whole birth experience and despite delivering a beautiful son, I struggle to remember his birth with any positive reflection. I feel as though if I had been able to labour whilst being cared for by a midwife I knew and had the pain relief I requested (epidural), perhaps I could have delivered vaginally and with less or no trauma. I may have always ended up with a caesarean but I feel as though I was not allowed access to the pain relief I needed to try and deliver vaginally. I have since sought a copy of my medical records and had a debrief with a midwife to talk through my delivery. While I was validated in my experience at this meeting, I do feel as though the midwife was working to maintain the hospital's interests. She also explained that should I have another baby, I would receive continuity of care to prevent a similar experience happening again. My question is, why is this gold standard of care only available to those who have experienced a trauma like or worse than mine? Wouldn't it be beneficial for continuity of care to be available to every birthing person so such experiences can be prevented? Further to this, I feel so hurt that the hospital system, through their own educational birth courses that they offer, espouse informed consent as being a non negotiable during pregnancy and birth but from my experience it was not sought by my midwife and caused a great deal of trauma by neglecting to obtain it.

I hope that in sharing my experience I can add to the many voices who are crying out for better maternal care within NSW. Birth trauma comes in many forms and seriously impacts many people's lives long after they have delivered their children. Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and please know that I am happy to give evidence at a hearing to help facilitate a comprehensive review of maternal health care in NSW. I am happy for my submission to be made public but I would prefer my name to be redacted please.

Kind regards,