

Submission  
No 958

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I became pregnant for the first time in late 2021 and was referred to the antenatal clinic at hospital. I was hoping for midwifery-led care, however due to a pre-existing thyroid condition I initially had to see an endocrinologist, which was understandable. I was cleared for midwifery care by the endocrinologist, but then contracted COVID and so was booked in to see the obstetricians for my next clinic appointment, which then became the norm for every appointment up until I was admitted in hospital for induction. It was never explained to me why I couldn't see the midwives, but at the time I was happy to just go with what was happening, as I work as a registered nurse in the public health system and felt confident in the care the public health system provides.

I eventually was admitted for an induction at 41 weeks, and this is when things started to not feel right. I was given prostaglandin gel 3 times in an attempt to dilate my cervix, which didn't work. My cervix was checked every 6 or so hours. The first time I had a check it was the most painful thing I've ever experienced, and each following check was more and more painful. I requested pain relief before one of the checks as I was terrified of the pain, but I was told I couldn't have any because of the upcoming check. I am still not sure why you can't have pain relief for cervical checks, this was never explained to me and I haven't been able to find an answer.

After over 18 hours of trying the gel, my cervix was still only at 1cm, and so they decided to put a Cooks balloon catheter in. The procedure took place at about 1am when there was a bed available in the birthing unit, and again I was given no pain relief for something that was described as "uncomfortable" but then became the new most painful moment I'd ever experienced. The pain continued for hours after insertion. I was finally able to sleep at around 5am after no sleep all night due to the timing of the procedure and the pain during and afterwards.

Finally, after a 3 day admission, the balloon was pulled out and I was dilated to 3cm, which meant they would be able to break my waters and start the induction. Because of the 3 days of pain that I had experienced, I requested an epidural as soon as I got to the birthing unit, as I couldn't handle the pain anymore. This was not my initial plan, I would have much rather have had an epidural later on and some time to labour on my feet for longer. Unfortunately the epidural only worked for a few hours and then failed, and I also had an obstructed labour, so I ended up having an emergency c-section. I was given a spinal block for my c-section which worked well but wore off quickly, to the point that although it wasn't painful, I could feel the surgeons stitching me back up.

Following this, I was given an oxytocin infusion due to some bleeding intra-operatively, and as my spinal block had worn off I was again in immense pain. I was feeling pretty defeated after 4 days of pain and minimal sleep. I was put into a 4 bedded bay with 3 other mums and their babies, so sleep remained minimal despite my baby sleeping for most of the first night. I was discharged home 2 days later having barely slept, and going home with a newborn which obviously meant minimal sleep for the foreseeable future. The sleep deprivation and pain made me so incredibly anxious that I could barely eat, despite constantly being told by various health professionals that I needed to eat because I was breastfeeding. I saw my GP 1 week later, and he immediately requested I come back frequently for ongoing monitoring as my Edinburgh postnatal depression scale was high. Eventually I was diagnosed with postnatal depression, started on antidepressants and commenced therapy. Thankfully these things worked really well and quickly.

Looking back on my experience, while I didn't end up with any long lasting physical damage that other women have, I feel upset for a few reasons. Firstly, it would seem that my body wasn't ready to give birth, and I do wonder if waiting a little bit longer would have allowed me to go into natural labour or at least made the induction easier. Booking me in for induction seemed very "routine", and I was so surprised I made it to that appointment without having had one appointment with a

midwife. Secondly, I feel that if I had received at least a bit of midwifery care in the prenatal period I may have been more prepared for what the induction would entail, and I may have been more inclined to stick with my plan to hold off on the epidural. And thirdly, if I knew the pain that would come from all of these interventions I may have decided not to go ahead with some or all of them. I would also love to know why I wasn't allowed to have pain relief before the interventions. The pain relief and lack of sleep before I even had my baby definitely contributed almost entirely to my postnatal depression diagnosis in my opinion.