

Submission
No 982

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Bianca Smith and I am 36 years old. I live in NSW and I have one son aged 5.

I make this submission out of hope that my story amongst many will help to bring about change in the birth space.

Almost 6 years later I still feel traumatized thinking about my birth and the aftermath. It has taken me this long to even consider trying to conceive again because the prospect previously frightened me so much. Upon reflection I feel that if I had been treated differently I would not feel as traumatized.

Shortly after labour began I felt something was wrong and I told the Midwife I felt my baby was posterior as I felt severe back pain and back contractions alongside abdomen ones. It was suggested that I have saline injections to reduce the pain so I had the first which I found excruciating and declined the second, only to have the Midwife chase me around the delivery suite to try give me the second injection.

I felt rushed whilst birthing and was told that as I had been at Hospital for over 12 hours and bub was posterior I would have to be transferred to Hospital. They said they were also worried about my waters being broken for almost 24 hours. I did not want to do this and my fear was this would increase the likelihood of intervention but I had no choice in the matter.

Whilst in the bath at Hospital the student midwife tried to pour boiling water over me in the bath. Luckily the midwife stopped her.

I was transferred to Hospital via ambulance strapped down was contracting with no way of reducing pain via strategies such as movement or water.

My mind broke during the ambulance trip and upon arriving I asked for an epidural. My cervix and bub's position was checked and I was told they felt I should have a caesarean. When I told them I did not want one unless it was needed I was pestered by a few hospital staff, asking why I didn't want to just have a caesarean. I spoke of my concerns but felt dismissed.

They told me that they would try give me a vaginal birth but I had to be prepped for a caesarean just in case. They suggested forceps and the ventouse to turn my son but risks were never explained. By this time things felt like a whirlwind and it was difficult to fully comprehend the possible consequences of a forceps assisted birth. I agreed readily, wanting the experience to be over with and my son to be in my arms. I was exhausted physically and emotionally. They also explained that they would just need to "cut a little bit" to help get him out. It turned out they were referring to an episiotomy. Again, I did not have the possible risks explained to me, nor was I told fully what it would involve. I was told I ended up having over 100 stitches and my husband still remembers the sound of them cutting through me.

During the birth it seemed to be taking longer than I would have expected but I did not know what to expect. After my son was pulled out he was struggling. They did not want to put him on my chest straight away because of this but luckily my midwife insisted. They put him on my chest and he seemed to calm down a little.

Four hours after birth my son began having a seizure whilst on my chest. He was rushed off me.

I was told he would have to be transferred to NICU and this would have to be a Sydney Hospital or _____ as _____ didn't have a NICU unit. We made the decision to have him transferred to _____ Hospital. I was asked if I would go with my son and husband that night or the next morning where I could be transported via ambulance. I was told by a Midwife that I would likely not see my son until the next day anyway so it was suggested that I leave the following morning due to being in such bad shape physically. My husband and son left and I was left to rest. Outside of my door I heard staff members talking about me. I heard one saying "I can't believe she didn't go with her son."

I was transferred to _____ Hospital and for the first 2 days I felt physically beaten up, in a wheelchair for the first two days and could barely walk. When I visited NICU a nurse in there said to me "you know it's your fault he's in here right? You should have just had a caesarean."

When in my hospital room I overheard an older midwife who had been helping me learn how to breastfeed tell another midwife on handover that she was worried I was not feeding my baby (untrue). I was not offered additional support considering her concerns.

_____ was in NICU unit for a week where they monitored him and ran tests. During this time, guilt ate away at me after the midwife's comment as I wondered if what had happened was my fault. On top of this I felt physically beaten up, in a wheelchair for

the first two days and could barely walk. After approximately one week we were told we could go home soon as the MRI results had shown no long-term damage or disability. They had voiced their concerns before this that he may have cerebral palsy. The cause of the seizure was ruled to be most likely a hematoma as a result of the forceps.

After going home I realised I had severe pain in my coccyx and could not sit flat properly. I assumed it was due to the epidural and did not realise something was wrong until I went to seek support and was told I had likely fractured or bruised my coccyx during the posterior birth.

I tried to talk to midwives about this was dismissed. An Aboriginal health organisation named _____ also dismissed my concerns when I rang them crying saying how much I was struggling during the postpartum period.

I then developed severe mastitis with a fever and felt a lump in one of my breasts. I told the lactation consultants at _____ hospital and was told to just keep massaging it. I tried to tell them I thought it was more than a simple blockage. I went to a doctor and he told me I would know about it if it was an abscess as I would be in a lot more pain. Once again I was dismissed. I demanded an ultrasound and an abscess was found that needed to be drained.

Two years on I was told I have a prolapse as a result of the birth

I have also developed health anxiety, with some days being so severe I have woken up convinced I will die.

It also impacted the mental health of my current husband and father of our child. He felt traumatized after the birth and developed depression afterwards as a result.

The birth experience and way I was treated by staff has caused long-lasting negative impacts and is still something I am working through to this day.

I sincerely hope the stories of the many women who have been traumatized, dismissed and treated poorly will be a catalyst for change. How many women need to be impacted for our pain and lifelong trauma to be taken seriously?