

Submission  
No 994

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 8 August 2023

---

Partially  
Confidential

I am writing this submission for the parliamentary enquiry into birth trauma in NSW. I was 33 years old when I finally fell pregnant with our first child, a daughter. After trying to conceive for over a year and turning to fertility treatment to assist us in the end to say we were excited was an understatement. Like many first-time parents we thought about the type of birth experience we wanted to have and decided to hire a private Obstetrician and deliver at Private Hospital.

Our prenatal care with our OB was exceptional and reinforced our trust that we had made the right decision in choosing him and the hospital for the safe delivery of our baby. We assumed that also meant the safe care of myself as the birthing mother and no reason to believe otherwise.

After some late-stage complications in my pregnancy a joint decision to induce me at 37 weeks 4 days was made and a date was set for me to go to hospital and be admitted.

I was induced using Cervidil tape and 24 hrs late nothing had happened, so I opted to have another round of Cervidil as my baby wasn't showing any signs of distress and I was hoping for a vaginal birth. After another 24 hours I had started contracting slightly and the joint decision was made to put me on the drip and bring on some stronger contractions aiming to get things moving, this helped a bit and eventually my membranes were manually ruptured.

Unfortunately, my labour ended in failure to progress after my baby began to show signs of distress. I was advised that going to theatre for an emergency c-section would be the safest course of action for both myself and our baby. By this point I had been in hospital on iv fluids for approximately 72 hours.

After our baby was born in theatre, I began to feel numbness that slowly crept up my torso and into my neck, I had to pass our baby to my husband as I lost feeling in my arms, then I started to vomit. So, while my OB was closing my incision, I was vomiting into a bag held by the anaesthetist and missing those precious first moments with my new baby. No one in theatre acknowledged this or comforted me, it was obvious upon reflection that it was 12:45am and they all just wanted to get the "job" done and get home.

A few days later I was still in hospital recovering from the birth when the paediatrician on duty came to examine my baby. I was alone at the time and still quite out of it from all the drugs and the absolute marathon I had just been on. He did a very quick cursory check of her, and I don't remember any discussions as I was too exhausted and drugged up to have a proper conversation. It is my feeling that he should have waited until I had a support person with me instead of forcing his consult on me in that state. Then he simply left.

Eventually there was talk of weighing my baby, which I was expecting as my Mum is a very experienced child and family health nurse. She has extensive experience in delivery suite, community health and is an IBCLC and served on the board. She advised me that they shouldn't be weighing our baby until she is over 100 hours old, yet I had nurses coming into my room at approximately 90 hours trying to weigh her. When I objected, they treated me with disdain, and it was clear that they were annoyed that I had objected and had likely interfered with their schedule of what they wanted to get done in that shift.

When our baby was eventually weighed and she had lost 13% body weight, the tone immediately shifted. I was being grilled about my breastfeeding (which I was certain was going fine as my mum was staying overnight with me and assisting teaching me to feed) and the nurses immediately started talking about getting some bottles and formula to "top her up". I had expressed loads of colostrum and that was in the freezer in the nurses' area, yet they didn't even bother to consult with

me about the plan moving forward and immediately started jumping to panic stations about needing to top her up. I was very upset and overwhelmed at the sudden change in the nurse's demeanour in how I was being treated, almost as though I had caused this loss in birth weight somehow, like I was somehow negligent. I called my Mum and she then mentioned that it also needs to be taken into consideration that I had 3 days of IV fluids prior to birth which would have caused an inflated birthweight to begin with. When I brought this up the nurses were dismissive and said that's not a "thing that happens". When I look back at photos of my baby the day she was born she is puffed up like a balloon visibly full of fluid, so I don't see how the IV fluids I had did not affect her in any way.

I decided that I wanted to go home and be discharged, and the nurses were extremely pushy about me needing to stay for the health and safety of our baby, even commenting that "they will discuss it with Dr [redacted] (the paediatrician) and get him to come and speak to me, but he's not going to be happy". I had already seen my OB that morning who told me I could go home as soon as I felt well so I told the nurses not to bother sending Dr [redacted] down as I'm not interested in anything he has to say.

Things got out of hand to the point where I had to throw a nurse out of my room and told her no one is to come in here unless they have my discharge papers. I called my husband crying and emotional and begged him to come and get us as quickly as possible. I was incredibly stressed and worked up, the feeling that the nurses were actively trying to prevent me from leaving made me scared and distrustful. I was a first time Mum who had just had major surgery and needed care and support, but their behaviour backed me into a corner where I didn't feel like I could trust them to ask about any of my concerns or questions lest it be used against me. I was 3 days post birth with baby blues kicking in, the nursing staff should have been wrapping me in cotton wool, not pressuring me about my baby's birthweight. My wellbeing was not discussed at any point.

Eventually my discharge was completed, and we rushed out of there, in our haste we forgot to take any "leaving hospital" photos and once we got to the carpark I had an emotional breakdown crying. We barely spoke in the car on the way home as we were so shellshocked from how I had been treated.

Ultimately, I experienced Post-Natal Depression and Anxiety and had to take anti-depressants for 6 months, and speak to my psychologist weekly, which I still do 3.5 years later. I also undertook Kinesiology therapy to try and move past this birth trauma as I fell pregnant with my second baby and felt enormous fear about birthing in the same hospital and possibly reliving this experience all over again. I was incredibly naïve, as was my husband, in thinking that the hospital would provide caring support to me as the birthing person, as much as provide medical care. We even did their birth prep course, and this led us to believe this was all the information and education we needed to have a safe and happy birth experience. In hindsight it was laughably inadequate.

For my second birth I educated myself a lot more and aside from re-engaging my OB (who I trust implicitly) I also hired a doula to advocate for me, our baby and my partner. This is my privilege to do so, as having private health bills, OB bills and a doula as well has cost us thousands of dollars that most people don't have, not to mention the years of therapy and anti-depressants. However, I did not feel safe to give birth again in that hospital unless I had a paid cheerleader in my corner in case things went south again.

My second birth was very healing for which I am grateful however when a friend shares they are pregnant for the first time I beg them to consider hiring a doula if they can budget for it as I simply do not trust the hospital system anymore. It saddens me, after growing up watching my mum

dedicate her life to nursing, to be in a position where I no longer trust nurses and I view what they tell me with a lens of suspicion. I am done having children but even the thought of falling pregnant again and possibly having to navigate that system again brings on feelings of worry and anxiety.

I pray that I will never be in a situation again where I am reliant on the hospital system to care for me or my family, and I equally pray that this submission goes somewhat towards showing the lasting effect birth trauma has on the birthing person. The bare-minimum approach is woefully inadequate, and it is time the hospital system realises the role they play in starting birthing people out on the right foot in their journey as parents. Our children deserve parents who are not traumatised from bringing them into this world.

Thank you for taking my submission into consideration and I wish you the best in this monumental task you have in front of you.