

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I'd like to share my experience with the public health system with the care of myself throughout pregnancy, birth and after care. I wanted to raise awareness of the importance of listening to mothers, even first time ones when it comes to theirs and their child's health.

When I was approximately 27 weeks pregnant, I woke in the middle of the night to extreme back pain, nothing that I had ever experienced before. I wasn't sure if I was in labour, or what was going on. I was vomiting from the pain and could not walk on my own. As such, my mum drove me to [redacted] hospital. Whilst there, I was given morphine and endone in an attempt to subside the pain and my unborn child was monitored closely.

Every time I was given the endone I would vomit more and the morphine would make my skin burn. I was constantly vomiting and crying in pain. Not once did any of the staff at [redacted] hospital think to put me on a fluid drip, despite the amount of times I vomited. I was incoherent and could barely understand what was going on.

After a while I was seen by a doctor who advised he believed the diagnosis to be kidney stones, to which they would not be able to treat as they did not have the appropriate endocrinologist and as such I was transferred to [redacted] hospital via ambulance.

Whilst at [redacted] the staff realised the kidney stones were too small to remove and as I was pregnant there wasn't much they could do. They continued to try and push morphine and endone to relieve the pain regardless of my husband explaining it only made me worse and did not work as pain relief. After a lot more pushing they attempted IV Panadol which worked really well.

The staff at [redacted] during this time were lovely, helpful and I was discharged a few days later. However, they advised my care would still take place in [redacted] and there was no game plan made to continue seeing me weekly regardless of the circumstances. I had scans to check if the stones had passed however that was the extent of the care regarding the kidney stones. I remember a few weeks prior to the stones being found that there was slight blood in my urine however this was quickly dismissed and never rechecked.

Following this, I only completed the regular pregnancy check-ups with [redacted] Hospital.

At 33 weeks, I noticed my whole body had begun to swell, lots of fluid in my feet and face. I took my blood pressure at a friend's house which was quite high, and continued to monitor it for 1 hour at home, then after no change my husband took me to [redacted] hospital. This was the only time that I was kept and monitored overnight courtesy of the head of [redacted] birthing unit being the doctor at [redacted] that night.

Tests showed that I did not have a protein in my urine, so they ruled out pre-eclampsia and set up weekly appointments and told me to come into the hospital if I had another high blood pressure episode.

These episodes continued to happen most days for the next few weeks each time I was sent home after a few hours of monitoring and a quick dip test to check the protein.

Every week I saw a different doctor, having to explain my past experiences and advising I was worried about everything as a whole. Each time I was checked my blood pressure would be high and I was monitored for 2 hours. Some appointments when my blood pressure was high during regular check-ups I was told to go for a walk for 30 minutes, get a blood test etc and come back once done. Each time I would return, my blood pressure would lower.

Each time my blood pressure would relax, and told I simply had 'white coat syndrome' and only had some symptoms of pre-eclampsia but because my urine lacked protein there was no way it could be that.'

I experienced headaches and fatigue during this time. I felt heavy and ill. I kept explaining that I did not feel right and that I was worried that I was going to be very sick and I wasn't going to make it to 40 weeks healthy

I met a female obstetrician at approximately 35 weeks who explained to me I was quite ill and that we should look into a c/section or induction at 38 weeks, however I never saw her again & this was never followed up again.

Following these few encounters, I was very much felt like I was brushed off a lot and made to feel that I was just stressed because I was a first-time mum but the thing is my body has never acted the way that it really should and that's what I kept explaining like my body can be a bit silly and I didn't feel that it could handle the pregnancy for too much longer.

Because I didn't have the typical pre-eclampsia signs, I don't think I was treated seriously and I also wasn't medicated for my high blood pressure where I believe that I should have been.

Surely enough on my 40 week appointment I had my blood pressure checked again and surely enough it was through the roof and I was then taken in for review. Over the next two hours, my blood pressure continued to get higher and higher where it hadn't previously.

Hospital then decided they would like to induce me as following blood and urine tests, they found the protein markers had increased astronomically. They advised they would complete a stretch and sweep, maybe put cream/balloon in to dilate me to get ready for an induction the following night.

I agreed to the induction at _____, believing I wasn't too sick and was checked over how dilated I was that day. The advised I was just 3cm so they did not have to give me any gel or insert the balloon to open my cervix. They quickly gave me a stretch and sweep to see if I would go into natural labour over-night, which I hoped for.

That night, I was closely monitored and medicated for the high blood pressure. Unfortunately, I did not go into labour naturally, nor did the blood pressure medication work. It was around midnight when the nurses advised it would be in my best interest to be given magnesium to reduce the chance of fitting during labour.

Throughout the night my blood pressure continued to rise, and I was advised in the morning that _____ Hospital did not feel comfortable inducing me there, and they would transfer me to _____ Hospital if there was room as their hospital was small and it was a dangerous situation.

When I got to _____, my husband, and I sat down with the doctors and asked if it would be better to proceed with a Caesarean section, as opposed to induction which could potentially lead to an emergency Caesarean section.

Also bearing in mind that I was also GBS positive which meant I needed multiple courses of antibiotics during the labour, where this could have been avoided had I just had a Caesarean.

They advised me that they did not want to give me a Caesarean section and that the induction would be fine. We continued back-and-forth with the doctors trying to come to a decision whether or not to be induced or go through the Caesarean however, the doctors were very adamant that they did not want me to have a Caesarean.

The thing that made up my mind was a doctor I believe or nurse advise me that it'll be fine as women with pre-eclampsia 'labour very quickly' and unfortunately I felt looking back that this gave me a lot of false hope and it also felt like they were declining my choice to go via a Caesarean. I did not feel like I had any say in my own birth.

As such, I advised that I was happy to have my waters broken, but I would like to check if I went naturally during that time before having any of the oxytocin. I was again told that they would only allow me to wait an hour or so before they would intervene and give the drugs.

I was also told that I was unable to labour in the bath which was one of the things that I would have really loved to do but because my child had to be monitored because I was getting induced and my blood pressure needed to be monitored throughout as well and I

would be attached to a drip and it was not possible.

Unfortunately, throughout that tiny window they gave me to go naturally I did not go into labour on my own and was forced to start oxytocin. The first couple of hours I would say was fine. I think we started on a low dose and I got the normal contractions, and my son was able to tolerate those. However, the nurse then after an hour upped the dosage to 10 mg and the contractions very quick and I was in a lot of pain.

At this point I had a lot of back pain, but my son continued to tolerate the contractions. Due to the back pain, we believed he was spine to spine. After another hour, the oxytocin was upped again, despite the fact that I was only 4cm dilated, in a lot of pain and had normal timed contractions.

Following this increase, the contractions then became unbearable, being 20 seconds apart and lasting up to a minute long each time. I barely had any time to catch my breath before the pain started again. I was so physically and mentally exhausted by this point.

I kept on being asked if I needed to push to which I kept explaining that no I did not, and when checked I was still only 4 cm dilated in my blood pressure remained through the roof with no medication helping that fact.

After review from the doctor, they advise that they were worried about the increase in my blood pressure and were worried that my body would not be able to tolerate the labour for much longer and I was advised that if I was to continue on the way that I was, I would end up fitting potentially, and if I ended up fitting that would put myself and my child at risk as such, I was strongly advised an epidural to which initially it was not something that I was interested in an absolutely terrified of and had explained this to the doctors previously.

After lots of conversations with my husband I asked the doctors to check how far along I was dilated, because if it was only a couple of centimetres left, I believed I would've been able to push through.

After approximately eight hours of labour and all that pain I was told that I still was stuck at 4 cm dilated at that point. This absolutely broke me and my spirit. I felt so let down by myself my body and all the people that were supposed to help me.

Following this, I agreed to get an epidural, despite my better judgement this helped me dilate another 3 cm. Unfortunately, though, the longer that I was going through labour and the more we went on my son's heart rate begin to drop, and it was closely monitored by the doctors. He had multiple scratch tests on his head to make sure he was getting enough

oxygen, and then a head of the obstetrician at _____ advise he was no longer comfortable with me continuing the way that I was, and that he would like an emergency Caesarean booked in ASAP.

After 11 hours of labour I honestly did not want to go through an emergency Caesarean as well and asked him to check how far dilated I was at that time. I was only 9 cm which we attempted to push but every time I would push my son's heart rate would drop, and he was not comfortable continuing on until the Emergency C-section was at least set up and ready to go in case anything went wrong. I did end up signing the forms to go into the caesarean, but advised I would like to be checked prior to being cut open again if I had dilated enough to which he happily agreed, and I appreciated this.

When we got down to theatre as promised, he did check again, and luckily I was 10 cm dilated, and he was happy for me to push with an assisted vacuum and episiotomy to get my son out after 12 pushes in approximately three or four contractions later, my son was born. I was so physically and mentally exhausted, and I turned on my side, and I spewed everywhere. I remember my husband, turning to me, tears in his eyes and saying, I'm so glad you got the one thing that you wanted, which was to not be cut open after going through so much already.

Whilst I appreciate the efforts of the doctors that helped deliver my son in the head of the obstetrician department in _____, the events leading up into my labour could've been easily prevented. Had I either been booked in for a Caesarean, knowing that I was on the path to pre-eclampsia, or even had pre-eclampsia, (just because I wasn't showing the textbook signs – doesn't mean I didn't have it).

I believe as well they had of been medicated for the high blood pressure instead of being sent home every single time it would regulate, even though they have been so many times that I was going to hospital to be monitored they did not believe that I had high blood pressure.

I believe if the nurses doctors had listened to me from that 33 week appointment or I had a singular doctor that knew every single thing in regards to my pregnancy that this again could have been avoided. I also believe that because of the kidney stones in my pregnancy I think that should've been reviewed against everything and looked into more because from what I understand is kidney and liver problems can actually cause pre-eclampsia whether or not the two were on par with each other is another question but I feel like a lot of this could've been easily avoided.

The way I was feeling coming out of his birth I was severely depressed and traumatised. I was not myself, and I felt so let down by the healthcare professionals that were supposed to look after us both and felt so weak when I could not advocate for myself, I had a terrible start to

motherhood. The first six weeks I continued to heal from pre-eclampsia. After a full week in hospital trying to find the blood pressure medications that worked – we only found that a mixture of 2 got my blood pressure to a regular high amount instead of all over the place I went home. Following this I was on blood pressure medication for six weeks and blood thinners every day for 10 days following and had to see specialists. In the first week being home, I ended up with a bad infection which my doctor believed to be uterine scarring from the use of instruments during the birth and I was prescribed 3 different antibiotics. I was swallowing 12 pills a day and having a needle injected into my stomach all whilst breastfeeding and getting used to motherhood.

Following all of this, my son had a lot of birth trauma from the vacuum, massive bruising and is also some-what delayed in his development. When he was born he was not checked for tongue and lip ties which he ended up having, causing massive problems in the first few months of his life. He would scream day in, day out from about 2 weeks old, up until 8 weeks after being medicated for 'reflux' and changing to formula. He was still irritable after this and we (after doing research ourselves) realised he may have a lip/tongue tie. To which he did, and at 4 months this was cut, and all reflux medications ceased and he was better and his development also began to improve. Although, he is still quite delayed still.

I'm only now recovering over six months later with the help of a therapist. I still cry all the time when talking about my birthing experience and have days where I feel sad, and somewhat alone despite the support. I pushed away a lot of people and really struggled to do day-to-day tasks. I am terrified to give birth again and I don't believe I will have another child because of the experiences that I went through and my broken trust of the system. I used to work in the healthcare setting, so I had so much trust in the nurses and doctors to have that blow up in my face is an understatement.

I only write this complaint/letter as an advocate for the women who are not listened to, for not proper review in the care, for rushing through the appointments, for the lack of consistency in the system,

I believe that induction should be the ultimate last option when it comes to delivering a baby. I know multiple friends and friends of friends who have been induced and 9 out of 10 have ended in an emergency C-section

I think these numbers need to be reviewed. I think these cases need to be reviewed and I think the care needs to be reviewed. I think we should be sectioning individuals to look after specific mothers so we're not constantly seeing different nurses and different doctors. I understand that it is a public system, however by the mistreatment / lack of care, it is only causing more issue in the long run and use of public health resources following these births (therapy, medications, etc)