

**Submission
No 1076**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

Hospital Feedback 23/06/2022

My partner, myself and my private midwife/doula () presented to Hospital on the evening of Saturday the 13th of August 2022 around 8:30pm. On last check I was 7cm dilated and had broken my waters and had laboured for several days at that point.

Though our original intention was for a homebirth, the decision was made on Saturday night to travel the 45 minutes to hospital to seek pain relief and rest as I was significantly fatigued and the baby's posterior presentation was making for slow and painful progress. Upon arrival at the hospital I expressed my desire for an epidural and an hour of sleep as I had not slept since Wednesday night. The midwives quickly began the process of preparing me for an epidural and they became aware that I had a significant and climbing fever (37.7C on arrival and eventually reached 38C) so they also gave me antibiotics.

When the doctor (Dr) arrived, she performed a cervical examination and confirmed that I was still 7cm. She made it clear that she felt I should be given synthetic Oxytocin immediately and attempt to deliver my baby that night. She made it clear that not doing so was risking my baby's health and that my uterus was likely too fatigued to push her out, and even less likely to be able to successfully contract and expel my placenta afterward, leading to a likely postpartum bleed.

Despite these warnings I requested the hour of rest I had originally asked for on arrival and said I was happy to receive the syntocinon after that point. Dr. informed us that she would be going home and that she would return later. She instructed the midwife () that I was to be given the syntocinon drip after 1 hour, and that did not need to call the doctor to check again before doing so. Both my partner and doula were present for all of this and my partner specifically heard these instructions. I then went to sleep (11:30pm).

My partner went downstairs while I slept and returned about an hour and 20 minutes later, but when he returned expecting the final stage of labour to begin he was informed by midwife that I had changed my mind and did not want the syntocinon anymore. He was understandably shocked that I would make such a decision without him. It wasn't until he spoke to me in the morning that he learned that what the midwife had told him was untrue. My doula remained in my birth suite throughout the night and could also confirm to him that no such conversation or change of mind had occurred.

At 3am I woke for the first time with significant aches and pains. Midwife appeared next to me and asked about the syntocinon, I told her I had just woken up and was feeling groggy, nauseous and sore, I asked for a few minutes to wake properly before discussing this. I was given nausea medication and the midwife left. I didn't know the time, where my partner was, or that I hadn't been given the drip already. The midwife did not return or ask again until morning.

In the morning, my partner returned and asked me about my decision 'not to go ahead with the syntocinon'. I was extremely confused by this and asked him what he was talking about. The doctor then arrived and also commented on my 'refusal' to receive syntocinon and

made it clear that she believed I was putting my baby at risk by doing so. I assumed she meant my insistence on waiting an hour the previous night and did not understand why I had not been given the drip in the night. It wasn't until later that I came to understand that the midwife had reported to the doctor, as she had to my partner that I had 'changed my mind' and declined the syntocinon after my partner and the doctor had left. Again, my doula was present all night and was able to confirm that this definitely had not occurred.

I then consented *again* to the syntocinon which was administered around 8:30am Sunday 14th of August. Dr [redacted] performed a cervical examination and confirmed that I was 10cm dilated and that baby was in a good position. She then gave me a stern speech about the likely outcomes of the birth – that I had an hour to push, that I may have placed my baby at risk, that I might need vacuum or forceps intervention, that my uterus may be too fatigued to push my baby out and I may need a caesarean, that I may have a postpartum bleed and that my baby may end up in the nursery. While I understand that much of this is a legal requirement of informed consent, I found the speech extremely negative and Dr [redacted] repeatedly put the blame on me for 'not consenting to the syntocinon' and 'putting my baby at risk'. She created an environment of fear, confusion and blame and then expected me to push my baby into the world after making it clear she did not believe I would be able to.

I pushed for an hour with the coaching of my partner, doula and midwife [redacted], after which Dr [redacted] returned and due to a change in baby's position, used the ventouse to assist her birth. She created an atmosphere of fear and shame and alternated between shaming me for my 'choices' and threatening me with worst case scenarios including the use of forceps which she later said she deliberately waves before mothers to scare them into pushing harder. This atmosphere was felt not just by me, but by my partner who came to believe at one point during the birth that he may lose me or the baby, or both. Despite the reality that no signs of distress or risk were evident in either myself or my child.

My baby was delivered at 9:58 that morning (14/08) and was confirmed to be healthy and without any signs of distress or trauma from the lengthy labour. However, Dr [redacted] still felt it necessary to visit me the following day and make three veiled judgements about my birth choices, with statements like, 'you did well, it's just a pity that you decided to delay the syntocinon' and 'I'm glad you're both well, it's just disappointing that you waited so long to come in'. These were statements that were completely unnecessary in retrospect and were particularly harmful on only my second day postpartum when I am coming to terms with my birth and new baby. She made it clear that she believes that 'hospital is the safest place to give birth' which is a statement I agree with, however, after the experience I have now had, I don't feel that I would feel safe returning to [redacted] Hospital for my next birth.

Before the birth of my daughter just weeks ago I would have described my view of hospital birth as a positive one. I trusted doctors and the hospital system and only chose a home birth for the following two reasons:

- a) Continuity of care with my private midwife. (Continuity of care is not available in the public system in our area)
- b) [redacted] did not allow women to birth in their birthing pools at that point in time and I had done extensive research on the positive outcomes of waterbirth and felt strongly about this option.

Now, after the experience I have had, I would sooner consider staying in another town for the later part of my pregnancy in order to access a different hospital, rather than attempt another birth at .

While my experience with Dr . was unnecessarily negative and at some points frightening, the most concerning part of my experience was having a midwife lie about my experience and my consent. I find it alarming how easy it was for a midwife to make a statement about what I did and did not consent to, and that this decision I had *apparently* made was then acted on, reported to my partner, then held against me in the morning, all without anyone checking whether that had in fact occurred. How can my consent hold any power if it's that easy for a medical professional to fabricate?

It is for that reason that any future birth in a hospital would make me feel extremely unsafe. How can I feel that I can trust my midwives or doctors, when they can so easily declare that I have said or decided something that I did not? If I hadn't had my doula there as a witness, I likely would have accepted midwife . narrative and assumed I'd made a decision I have absolutely no memory of. That is the power that our nurses, midwives and doctors have in our hospital system and after my experience I no longer feel safe in their hands.

13 August 2023 – While I wrote the above only weeks after the incident with the intention of submitting to the HCCC, I never did and have not re-opened this document until now. Only weeks after writing the above, I developed severe post-partum depression and anxiety which I am still receiving treatment for, and which almost claimed my life. Part of which is the result of the trauma I went through in the birthing wing at . Below is a poem I wrote a few months ago, about my experience.

While I slept

@littlewrittenwonders

After days of labour we went to the hospital
My partner and I
Let them put medicine directly into my spine
So I could rest a little while
Just an hour
After days and days of waves of pain
I said please,
Let me rest
Just a little while.

But that night a midwife lied,
Said that I had changed my mind
While I lay, eyes closed after days of pain
She made my decision for me
While I slept
Told the doctor I'd denied
medicine they said my bub required
While I slept

She told the father I'd changed my mind
Without him
While I slept

I was fortunate a friend was there
When I woke & heard I'd changed my mind
When I woke to scowling doctors saying
I was playing with my baby's life

She assured me that it wasn't true
That I was right to be confused
That no such talk had happened while
I trusted them to rest my eyes

But the doctor heard the midwife's lie
And scolded me for my 'choice' that night
Told me I'd risked my baby's life
Painted fear and dread where there'd been light

Thankfully my baby's fine
Delivered safely after morning's light
But despite the many good and kind
One midwife broke my heart that night.

Consent is yes, but also no
Cannot be changed when eyes are closed
These patients' trust holds up these walls
But a single lie can change it all.