

Submission
No 1080

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a student midwife, and during my first year, on my very first day, with my very first birth in the birthing unit I witnessed obstetric violence.

The woman I was caring for was struggling to birth her baby. She appeared tired and a little scared. She had been using gas as pain relief. Her husband was by her side and very supportive.

The midwife caring for her suggested an episiotomy to assist in birthing the baby and obtained the woman's consent. A female Dr was called in to perform it. I witnessed the Dr cut the full length of the episiotomy scissors, and then to my horror, she cut again. The baby was born shortly after.

Once the placenta had been birthed, the Dr advised the woman she would be suturing the episiotomy. The woman acknowledged this. She then looked at me, with tears in her eyes and asked if she could please use the gas while the Dr sutured. I told her that she absolutely could and promptly handed it to her.

The Dr saw me do so and said, "NO GAS". She then ripped it out of the woman's hands and said she could not have the gas while she sutured the episiotomy. She then injected the woman with local anesthetic and immediately began to suture.

The woman screamed in pain. "No" she cried. "STOP!" she said. The Dr did not stop. The Dr did not give her more local anesthetic. More midwives were now in the room, and I stood back and watched on in utter shock as they then held the woman down on the bed and held her legs still while the Dr completed her sutures.

I am ashamed to say that I stood back and said nothing. As a new student midwife, I did not know what I could do in that situation. Really, it was up to the many midwives in the room that day to speak up and advocate for the woman who was pleading for them to stop. Who was clearly experiencing a great deal of pain and distress.

I told her husband that he should probably see to it that his wife had some kind of therapy after this experience as she will most likely be traumatized from her birthing experience.

When I later questioned the midwives as to why the Dr would not let the woman use gas, I was simply told that that Dr never lets any woman use gas as she believes it causes bleeding.

Since that day, I have questioned many midwives as to whether they felt women bled more using gas and not a single midwife agreed. I have done my own research and found that it is not the case. That gas is one of the safest pain relief options for women with very few short-lasting effects.

The midwife who was initially looking after the woman later said to me "What you saw in that room today was not ok. That was assault."

I feel traumatized from what I witnessed. I can only imagine how that poor woman was afterwards.

That Dr should have been fired. That Dr should have stopped as soon as the woman said no.