

Submission  
No 1085

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

My first pregnancy was throughout 2021 and my maternity care and birth was at Hospital, NSW.

Public

My pregnancy was straightforward and overall uncomplicated. An early ultrasound showed that I have 2 fibroids at the top of my uterus, but they hadn't grown during pregnancy and were not obstructing my cervix so were just monitored. I had my heart set on having a natural vaginal birth.

I was able to have a student midwife assigned to me, but wasn't able to have my husband or family with me for support at any of my midwife appointments due to the covid restrictions. Apart from my student midwife, there was no continuity of care and the information which the midwives and obstetricians gave me would change depending on who I spoke to.

I was told by a midwife in the late stages of my pregnancy, that my husband might not be able to be at the birth because of our personal medical choices, which were being widely enforced at the time, which thankfully wasn't the case, but caused me a massive amount of stress throughout the end of my pregnancy.

I had started looking into private home birth options because I was being pressured and didn't feel heard at my appointments, but at that stage of my pregnancy the very few homebirth midwives that operate around my area didn't have any availability to take any more clients on. The only alternative option would have been to free birth which I wasn't comfortable doing.

From 41 weeks I started having "tightenings" every 10-20 minutes of the late evenings I would go to bed and then they would stop.

I had a Foetal Assessment (41 weeks) at the hospital with an Obstetrician and Midwives - I felt good and both my baby and I were healthy and CTGs and ultrasounds were showing no distress or complications but the hospital were pressuring me to book in an induction simply because I was "overdue".

I was booked in for another Foetal Assessment at (41 weeks 4 days) at the hospital with the Obstetrician and Midwives that morning. I was having more constant "tightenings" every 15-30 minutes throughout the morning. The Obstetrician performed an Ultrasound to check the baby and the placenta - they told me that the amniotic fluid was reducing and I was at risk of the placenta failing because I was "so overdue" and wanted me to book an induction - which I didn't want - so to keep them off my back, I instead agreed to have an internal exam to see how things were coming along - and said that if nothing was happening we would discuss about having a stretch and sweep. While I was having the internal exam the midwife advised that my cervix had reduced to about 1 cm long and was 1-2cm dilated and then told me "I'm just going to do the stretch and sweep while I'm here", without us having agreed that I would be going ahead with it.

That night the contractions became much more intense and closer together. By midnight the contractions had become 2-3 minutes apart, and lasted about 1 minute and had been for about an hour. We called the hospital to ask what to do, where the midwife said "it's your first baby you're not ready to come in yet, just stay at home".

We waited at home for a little while longer but they were becoming quite painful so we called again and went to hospital. When we arrived the midwife insisted I had a routine internal exam. Because my contractions were so close to each other, another contraction came during the internal exam and was extremely painful so I asked the midwife to stop. She was frustrated by this and told me "your only 2-3cm

dilated, I told you not to come into hospital yet” which made me feel completely depleted and I just wanted to go home.

The contractions then halted from 2-3 minutes apart to 10-15 minutes apart. Although I wanted to go home, we then had to wait for the Obstetrician to do more checks and another ultrasound - which took about 3 hours until he arrived - results were the same as earlier the day before - we were both well - but because I was overdue and the amniotic fluid was reducing he didn't want me to leave and wanted to discuss induction that morning (41 weeks 5 days).

They wanted to put me in the postnatal ward for the rest of the morning, but my husband would have to leave - due to the fears the midwife had previously distilled in my appointment I wasn't going anywhere without my husband with me - so because they wanted me to stay they put me in a private room on the birthing ward so my husband could stay and I wouldn't go home. They were short staffed and just left us all day until we would call to see if anyone was coming to see us. All of that day the contractions remained the same at 10-15 minutes apart.

The Midwife supervising that night came to us at about 6pm to take us to a birthing suit. By this stage I had had little sleep in two days, so I had a bath to try to relax and they gave me a sleeping tablet so I could try to get some sleep to start an induction in the morning.

(41 weeks 6 days) At 8am the Midwife started the induction by breaking my waters and giving me the syntocinon. I was as active as I could be, being hooked up to the syntocinon drip and CTG monitoring throughout the labour trying to move through the contractions. I don't remember much of the day and just felt drunk on the gas. About 5pm I began having a crisis in confidence and I just wanted the labour to be over. I asked the Midwife to do an internal exam and check what was going on. I had reached 7-8cm dilated but the lip of my cervix had become swollen and my baby's head was having trouble coming down. During the internal exam the midwife then tried to manually stretch my cervix over my baby's head but it was too swollen. The Obstetrician then came in to discuss my options because I was “progressing too slowly”. He strongly advised me to have an epidural to try to reduce the swelling. I didn't want to have the epidural but didn't feel like I had any other options and wanted the labour to be over, so I reluctantly agreed.

After having the epidural we were told that they were just going to leave us to relax for a little while and they would come back in an hour or so to check if the swelling had reduced.

After being able to move through the contractions all day, I felt numb and helpless just laying on the bed. I asked my husband to help me move onto my side in order to somewhat be in a better position. Over the next few hours I felt myself going in and out of consciousness and the midwife on duty was only coming in to check the CTG. My husband asked a number of times where the Obstetrician or the Midwife was to check on my progress and they just kept saying they'll be here soon but no one came. It was about 11:30pm before they came back to check on me. They did another internal exam at which they said I had gone back in dilation and was now 6-7cm and the lip of my cervix was still swollen and they told me that they recommended that I have a C-Section. I hadn't had much sleep in 3 days and I couldn't move because of the epidural and exhaustion. I had lost all hope in having the energy to push through and have a vaginal birth and just wanted it to be over, so agreed to have the C-Section.

Our daughter was born at 1:30am at 42 weeks gestation. I was happy to finally meet our daughter, but I didn't feel the instant bond, or rush of oxytocin. I didn't feel like I had given birth to my daughter, but rather that her birth had happened to me. I got a couple minutes with my daughter and husband before they took them back to the Birthing suite to wait for me to come out of recovery. I met my husband and daughter on

the postnatal ward at 3:30am where my daughter had her first breastfeed. The midwives on the birthing ward had told my husband that he would be able to stay with us because of the nature and timing of her birth. But when we arrived the midwife on the ward told us that my husband had to leave because partners aren't allowed on the ward at night. I could barely move and now I was alone with my new baby. A couple of hours after my husband had to leave my daughter began to spit up, the bassinet was close enough for me to reach her but I couldn't move enough to pick her up on my own. I called on the buzzer for help and nearly 5 minutes later a Midwife came. All I could do was hold my daughter on her side so she didn't choke. The postnatal ward was busy, and short staffed and they couldn't come when I needed help.

The first night after my daughter's birth, the baby who was in the shared room with us was unsettled most of the night, even though the midwives were trying to help the new mother and newborn (although probably not as much as she needed). So in between tending to my daughter I wasn't able to get much sleep for the fourth night in a row.

The second day after my daughter's birth, my husband was back during the day, so I tried to get some sleep. About two hours later I somewhat woke up in a panic feeling like I was falling, kept calling for my husband (who was right next to me) and I didn't know where I was, until my husband woke me up properly and claimed me down.

I wanted to get the hell out of there. I was in so much pain, could hardly move without assistance and didn't feel like the Midwives had the capacity to care for me and all the other women on the ward during the nights when my husband wasn't allowed to stay. It wasn't even 48 hours since my daughter was born and I had had the C-section so the hospital said the earliest I could leave was the following day if an Obstetrician gave me clearance, which thankfully they did and we went home.

I was happy to be home and have the support of our family. I have never been in so much pain and so dependent on others to help me just to do the most basic things like getting out of bed or taking a shower. I was so disappointed with my daughter's birth, and in hindsight wished we had done things differently and that I had listened to my intuition on what we thought was best for myself and our baby, not just doing as we were told to do because it was "hospital policy".

There are not enough accessible options for women to choose from when it comes to maternity care. In my area the only other option opposed to going to hospital that I could find was hiring a private homebirth midwife which are in high demand and can also be costly. There is only about a 20% medicare rebate for this option compared to very minimal cost with going through the public system.

Medical intervention is a wonderful thing when needed and we are lucky in Australia to have access to it, but women with low risk pregnancies like my own end up having a cascade of intervention, added stress and fear mongering when it is simply not needed. My baby and I are healthy, and I am thankful for that. Many women go through much worse than I did, but I still find that my experience was traumatic and don't want to go through the hospital system for our second baby because of what happened to us.