

Submission
No 1099

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Birth Trauma - 2023

Dear Committee members,

I am a NSW resident and I experienced trauma related to the birth of my third child at Hospital on 29 June 2023. Below is my story.

Before I start, some relevant background for context – I am a mother of two, and my first two babies were born with no complications, apart from second-degree tears. Both were inductions, both in private hospitals and with private obstetricians (OBs). I am also a women's health physiotherapist and have been working in women's health for the past 10 years.

Antenatal/ pre-labour

My story starts when I was about 37 weeks pregnant and I went in for a standard appointment on the Monday (26th June) where, due to low fetal movements and my blood pressure measuring as a bit high, I was told I would need extra monitoring and to book in for an induction on the Friday. Shortly after I was then told I would need to come in to be induced the next morning (Tuesday) instead.

However, I have two children, one of whom has Type 1 diabetes, so this was not possible to manage as nothing was arranged to provide care for my other children. The team agreed I could do the induction later in the week. I felt really worried about what was happening, so I rang the hospital later to find out why the team wanted to move the induction up to an earlier date and I was told due to a risk of stillbirth. The hospital advised I could come in on the Wednesday instead but was still at risk of stillbirth.

When I arrived at the hospital on Wednesday, I was told they could not do the induction that day, yet nothing had changed in terms of my condition. The reason they gave was because of staffing (i.e. not enough staff) so they might have to send me home. An hour later they returned and said they *would* do the induction, so they inserted the Cervidil; an hour or so later I was having consistent cramping and signs of early labour and I was moved to the birth suite.

They removed the Cervidil around 7pm that night as I was having strong contractions (according to the monitor sitting around 110-120) and they said they would send someone to assess me and see if I would need the balloon catheter. They told me I was not in labour but that it was only that my cervix was reacting to the Cervidil. The contractions continued to intensify but I kept being told I wasn't in labour. But, I was timing contractions and they were getting stronger and closer together.

At midnight I was assessed as 3cm dilated, favourable for an Artificial Rupture of Membranes (ARM), and told I probably wouldn't even need the balloon catheter. I was told that my membranes would be ruptured and Sintocin started if needed at 6am the following morning. Suggested I get some rest.

Labour

Over the next couple of hours, the pain was intensifying so I called someone in for pain relief. I asked if I should get up and get things moving as I had been having contractions, but I was told to just rest while I could as things would get going first thing.

A couple of hours later the contractions and pain were very intense and the shower was not cutting it. I asked if I could just have my membranes ruptured and an epidural and get it started. I was told no. I asked for more paraneine - told no and that the only option was a morphine injection because I was too early and not really in labour, but I was not even assessed. I also really, really didn't want to have the morphine but the pain was so bad and I felt like it was pushed as the only option. I had the morphine at 3.45 am and it seemed to stop the labour.

There was no activity at 6am, and at 7am I buzzed and was told they couldn't tell me when things would start. At 8am I asked about breakfast and induction, and again at 9am I asked what was going on and told again that they didn't know. I asked to speak with the team leader – was told again we don't know when, and they went to start someone else's labour instead (because "they really need to get started").

Even though I was told I was at risk of stillbirth, there was still no action, and I had no monitoring or assessment since midnight. I asked to be monitored again but they refused to check me or to break my waters. I was then told it wouldn't happen before lunchtime and was told me again I wasn't in labour. (I thought anything over 70 was active labour, and was having contractions at rates over 100 for over 12 hours).

This was all really concerning to me and I voiced this as I was told just days before that I needed to be induced ASAP and that there were risks of stillbirth. Yet, I had been at the hospital for over 24 hours and having contractions for over 12 hours, and now I was not being monitored, and not being induced. I felt they were too busy and I for some reason was not a priority.

I asked to have my waters broken because I knew I would labour quickly because of my previous experiences. I had a really clear birth plan – if it looked like I would tear, give me an episiotomy etc.

At 3pm a doctor came in to assess me, after my last assessment was midnight the night before. The first thing he said was "what is this bed; it's not even a birthing bed" and they had to swap beds. This is the same midwife who ended up delivering. He then assessed me and said very sternly to the midwife, "she is 5-6 cms with bulging membranes", which made it seem that he had been told I wasn't in labour. I was now getting really concerned about my baby's wellbeing. He inserted a canula and ruptured my membranes.

I had a very clear birth plan and asked the midwife to arrange for an epidural, and when she came back she said she had called the anaesthetist but "that she thought the baby will be born very quickly". It felt like she was suggesting I would not need an epidural and I said sternly "I am having an epidural. I have been labouring for 24 hours."

While prepping me she tried to push saline and had trouble even getting it in the IV, and then she left and said she was going to afternoon tea. The anaesthetist came in shortly after and asked where the midwife was, so when I said she is at afternoon tea he said he would go and help another lady because "she has been labouring for 5 hours and you're not in labour".

Birth

Once the anaesthetist came back and administered the epidural, it was great. I could feel just enough that I could feel the contractions tightening, but I felt like the way the midwife was coaching me to push was harder and faster than I was comfortable, and she kept turning the monitor away so I couldn't see it when what I really wanted was to get into a good rhythm myself. I also asked for perineal care/ perineal pressure, which she only did for about 30 seconds. She didn't provide a warm compress or anything and it was the worst care from her.

I was on my knees and birthed my baby's head, and everything felt good. My perineum was intact (I have photos), even though his head was in the 98th percentile. I felt good, I felt his shoulders turning and knew he would be born on the next push or two. Then I felt the midwife feeling around, checking his neck for the cord. I felt her fiddling for a bit, and I thought he might have had the cord around his neck. I didn't feel her slip the cord, but I was not panicked by this. I could feel my baby's shoulders turn and thought I will kneel up in a second and get him.

Without warning and without saying anything the midwife ripped him from my body violently, in an unnatural upward angle, and at pace. She ripped him posteriorly upward towards her head. He should have come underneath me, in front. As she did this, I made a moan in shock and I felt my body rip; I felt everything give way. It was a huge shock. I have photos that show my perineum was now torn. She said not one word before, during or after this violent act.

There was also nobody else in the room at the time, except me, my husband, and the birth photographer. I am confused as to why she got me to start pushing before a second midwife arrived, and it seems from everything she was very inexperienced. She actually told my birth photographer while setting the trolley "When I tell you, push that button for help".

It took about 3mins from the time the button was pushed for the second midwife to arrive. When bub came out he was not breathing properly - I think maybe the cord could have been around his neck, because he was born and you could see capillaries in both eyes, and his face was very swollen. I was rubbing my baby and kept saying "is he ok is he ok" my partner was saying "is he ok". He was limp.

My baby was completely birthed and I was trying to rub him and stimulate his breath when the second midwife walked in the door. The midwife who ripped him from me was behind me, and she did not get up and look and did not say anything. The second one came over and got a towel to help stimulate him. The second midwife took charge and took our baby

for resuscitation because he was really struggling. They tried to put him on oxygen, then she called for the NICU nurse because he needed more help, and he was taken away to the NICU.

Post-natal care – birth suite

As my baby was going to NICU I asked my husband to go and be with the baby, so I was left alone. While the midwife was still there I asked her "why did you do that? Why did you rip him like that? Were his shoulders stuck?" she said "no, I thought they were for a second but they weren't". I also asked how badly I was torn. She didn't even look and said "Oh, maybe a 2nd degree", but I knew it was worse. I asked for a doctor to be properly assessed. When the doctor came he did the full assessment and said it was at least a 3a tear and I would need to go to theatre. I just cried.

I asked how long before the theatre would be free because my baby had been taken to the NICU. The midwife just disappeared; I don't even recall her doing any observations, and I was left waiting for surgery, covered in blood on the sheets I birthed in, in a puddle of my own filth. I have never been left like that. I didn't even have a buzzer to call for help. My birth photographer actually stayed because she was worried about me.

When the midwife finally came back in more than an hour later, she said I couldn't shower or anything in case we needed to be ready to go to theatre. I had to almost beg to be cleaned, and asked if I could at least have a sponge bath. I was so upset, considering all the implications of the tear – that I would have to back to the shared ward, incontinent, and alone. At this point, I was sobbing asking for a shower, begging not to have to go down to the ward, to the dirty, shared showers for my first post birth shower. The nurse ignored this. I asked if after surgery I could come back there to have a shower, rather than in the shared shower (because I was covered in blood) and she said no.

It was about 2 hrs after the birth and she said she could give me a shower. Then she said no, because of the epidural, even though I had been up. Then she finally agreed to sponge me but just got the bowl of water, did half my right foot, and then just handed it to my husband to finish because she was too busy. I found this humiliating. I was covered in blood, I had an open wound, and she had him wash me. But I was just so sad and so desperate I let it happen.

I also had to ask repeatedly for her to change the sheets. I was still in a puddle of filth and I sat in that for two hours. I did say to her "Change this sheet. You have let me sit in this, and I am still sitting in this. It's a disgusting wet puddle". She didn't even apologise. She also refused to let me go to see the baby (who was next door in the NICU).

I had to tell her to go and ask when theatre would be ready and she said the doctor said there has been an emergency and they will get to you. I can't recall any observations being done in the hours post-birth, although I remember her doing a set right before I went to theatres.

There were so many negligent aspects – no empathy, no dignity, no care for me at all. She did not ask me if I was ok, she did not ask if my baby was ok, she did not ask me my baby's name, she did not even stop the bed so that I could kiss my partner before surgery. No one even told my partner where to wait or when I would be out or how they would let him know I was out and ok. I required two hours of surgery.

Care for baby

During my inpatient stay I became increasingly worried about my baby. I asked nurses to check him for jaundice. I asked 3 times. His levels on the light appeared ok but I then I woke at 5 am to him breathing hard and I was growing more concerned. I still thought he was jaundiced. He looked it to me but I thought maybe he had a cold too I asked the nurse to get him reviewed as I was worried.

The NICU Dr performed this review. She found that: (my new son) bilirubin levels were high, requiring treatment, she also found that my Group B Streptococcus (GBS) swab was in fact positive and she noted that I had not received IV antibiotics in labour and that when originally went from birth suite to NICU it was falsely handed over to them at that point that I was GBS negative.

To note: During my time on the birth suite I asked an estimated 6 times for my GBS swab results. I was told they weren't back a number of times, and then finally the midwife told me I was negative. It turns out she had read the result incorrectly, and this resulted in her failing to provide me with IV antibiotic coverage in labour. This exposed our newborn to GBS.

This was extremely distressing for me to hear. I told Dr I had asked many times about that swab and was waiting for it to come back. I told her the midwife told me it was negative and that there was time for me to have had the antibiotics. I told her I was furious that had been exposed to GBS, it was an unnecessary risk and something I should not need to worry about.

Postnatal care - on ward

I was in hospital for over a week, and although I was given a bedside debrief, it was rushed and with a junior doctor, and again I felt unheard. The Senior Resident (SRMO) seemed to be telling me what happened during my birth. She did not listen to me when I told my birth story.

On about night 5 or 6 I noticed discharge – what I thought was pus – and increasing pain, with a red, hot, hard area on my perineum to the right of my wound. I was in constant pain. I had a review in the middle of the night, and that doctor and the nurses felt there was an infection. However, they needed to get a consultant in to make a decision on whether to just administer antibiotics or do a washout. I saw a female consultant who just looked and said it was fine.

A male consultant the next day again looked and said it was normal and fine. I asked him directly “are you sure this isn't an abscess? Are you sure it not infected?”. He said it's

definitely not infected; it is normal serous fluid. I asked both consultants "what is this hard sore area? Is it a haematoma? Abscess?" and was told it was normal.

When I told the midwife I had rectal pain she said "Of course you're sore, you tore through your bottom" as if I was being silly. They kept telling me it was normal, and the stitches look great; I had to keep telling them it is not the repair, it is the area next to it. I sent a picture to my sister, who is a paediatric specialist, and she even said it looks like an abscess.

I was assured it was completely normal and definitely not infected, but I was put back on IV antibiotics for a couple of days, which they said was precautionary. I asked about the swab (as they had swabbed the area) and kept asking what it was. Got no direct answers. Just kept being told "it's fine, it's normal". I didn't understand why I had so much pain rectally when my vagina was fine.

In total I spent 8 days in hospital. My baby went to NICU twice and required CPAP and IV antibiotics. I was unable to breastfeed due to the tear and pain, have I struggled to bond with my baby, and to cope with the shock of this birth. I could not, and still cannot make sense of why the midwife acted so violently.

Discharge and outpatient care

I was discharged on 7th July. When I was discharged, I didn't receive any oral antibiotics, because they said it's not infected. I also had to ask repeatedly, and almost beg the senior RMO for pain relief to leave the hospital. They knew I was still having Endone through the day but I felt they were reluctant to prescribe anything and wanted to discharge me with no pain relief. I was still in constant pain and couldn't sit, so I was having trouble breastfeeding, and they ended up giving me only 5 Endone to go home with. I thought it was just me. That I just can't tolerate pain.

I had excellent mental health support in hospital. I was seen by psychiatry and social work at my request on the first day. The three women I saw offered me amazing support and really helped me survive that first week. I was then referred for outpatient follow up.

I had a call from intake the Monday after I got home (10 July), and she asked how I was. I said not good, I'm really bad. I was teary. She explained my case would be reviewed the following day and then someone would call with a plan for care. She got me to write down two numbers for mental health help. I didn't hear from them again until Friday (14th) when I was told I could see at 2 or 3 pm on Monday. I asked how long the appointment was for and was told 30-45mins. I said I don't think I can do that I have kids at school.

I was told "this will just be a one-off session to make sure that this doesn't become a problem for you". I was so beat down at this point that I said nothing, but I thought "this is already a problem for me, this is a major problem for me, and you think it will be solved in 30-45mins. I just told you I was not doing well. I said I was bad".

She then said she could see someone had called and hadn't got onto me, so I needed to make sure I contacted them to ensure there was no risk to me or the baby. I said I'm not

sure who you are talking about. Are you talking about the baby nurse? She said yes. I told her I thought they were coming on Wednesday. She said she could only see a note that they hadn't been able to contact me. Told me again make sure you follow that up so there is no risk. I said I don't even really know who you are talking about and I have no numbers. S

he said would call next week to re arrange appointment, but it would just be one, then I would have to go privately. I felt like I could hardly get myself out of bed but now needed to coordinate my care. It was too hard and too overwhelming. I felt so low I couldn't be bothered with anything.

I felt dismissed, like my mental health concerns were not taken seriously, and that the burden was on me to follow up and reduce risk, but I had no strength to do any of it.

Hospital re-presentation

Meanwhile, the pain in my perineum just got worse and worse, and I felt like I needed Endone again. It was the 29th July – a Saturday night – and the pain was so bad I thought I couldn't make it to Monday to see a GP. I really didn't want to go back to the hospital but I had to, so I called and explained what was going on.

I told them I had this area on my perineum that was hard, hot and very painful. I said it's exactly what I had when I was first in hospital and they put me back on IVAB. I said it hasn't gone away it's getting more painful. I said I experienced a very traumatic birth and am mentally not doing well. I said that I did not want to come back but that I knew I couldn't wait until Monday as the pain was getting too much. I also said that I did not want nurse anywhere near me or to be my nurse. The triage nurse was good and told me she wasn't on either shift and also said that she would make sure I wasn't in the same room I birthed in.

When I arrived the OBGYN on duty took one look and said, "I think you have an abscess" and I just cried. This was exactly what I had when I was being discharged. She also said that she needed to get the general surgery team to come and assess because "I'm not a bum dr" and can't say for sure what this is, and the general surgery team would need to assess as they will be the team to manage this.

I felt angry. I was upset. I said I asked on day 5/6 post birth if this was an abscess. It was exactly this. I was told everything as normal. Not once did the OBGYNs down on K2 say that they couldn't diagnose or assess an abscess; they told me it was normal and not infected and definitely not an abscess. This had now been festering for a month and getting worse.

I had surgery on 30th July to drain and washout a peri-anal abscess. The following day the surgeon told me that when he got in there it was much larger than he thought and he could fit his whole pinky finger inside. That it tracked from 8/9 o'clock position to the 1 o'clock position where he could feel the repair began. It seemed like at first they tried to suggest the abscess could be coincidental, but after seeing its size and position admitted it was probably connected to the repair.

Debrief

I decided I want a formal debrief and advised I will be requesting my notes. Originally I was told it would be 3-4 weeks for the notes, and now it will be 8-12 weeks. I am now 6 weeks postpartum and we are still going back and forth on the details for the debrief and I feel like they keep trying to push my debrief earlier, but I want to wait for my notes.

On the **25th July** I got a call from the birth suite to discuss arranging it. They said it would be on the Monday so that Professor (the consultant) and some random urogynaecologist consultant can be there. She was quite rude when I asked who would be in the room – they want to have two consultants that were not involved in my care – I want to know why the midwife involved in my care or the surgeon who did the repair be in the room, I asked, why her, and it's because she works with Prof .

I said I wanted Dr , who had performed the repair, because I felt I would get no answers from who I saw once for 15 mins and a uro-gyny I had never seen, and who could talk generally about a 3rd degree tear. I want the person who saw it and repaired it there. I also stated I want the people there who can answer the questions as to why things went so poorly in the 24 hrs prior to the birth. Not people who had no involvement in that time. I asked for the midwife to be there but no told she won't be there they don't do that. I was told the surgeon is "too junior" and they "certainly won't put that midwife in the room with you".

I asked how many people I can have in the room with me, and she asked who I wanted. I said I don't want to talk about who; I want to know *how many* people I am allowed to have. She insisted on knowing who I wanted to have, and if I was planning to have legal representation in the room that "I should give the Professor the decency of letting him know if I was planning to have legal representation there".

Last Thursday, 3rd August, I got another phone call from another birth suite NUM. She asked how I was, baby's name and how he was. I told her I was not well. The antibiotics are making me nauseous and causing diarrhoea. That my mental health was still poor and that needing to re-present and have a second surgery was very traumatic. She was empathetic and apologetic.

She said she had spoken with Dr and that she had now arranged a meeting for Thursday 10th August. I asked if this was just a meeting or was this the debrief. I did not get a clear answer. I said I have requested a debrief but I am still waiting for my clinical records. I said I do not want to proceed with the debrief until I have my clinical notes, have time to read them and prepare all of my questions. I also said I think I am still too acutely unwell to do the debrief next week. She said we can still meet, and I said ok if I am well enough that may be ok, but I do not want this to be the debrief or be instead of the debrief. She said she would call me on Tuesday and see if I was well enough.

Summary of issues	
Admission through to birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal monitoring - Denied checks - Denied ARM - Denied the pain relief I requested - Poor communication - Incorrect bed - Incorrect GBS results and therefore no antibiotics; exposing my baby to strep-B, which can be deadly - Being told I was not in labour
Labour and birth	<p>Obstetric violence and unsafe delivery practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No consent or communication - Not being told what was going on - Not provided pain relief on request - Not believed I was in labour - Minimal monitoring and inconsistent information. - Only one midwife in the room. - I had completely birthed my baby before second person arrived in the room - Violent and painful - When she suspected shoulder dystocia she did not press the emergency button she panicked and ripped my baby out of me in such a violent manner. - Poor communication - she did not say one word about the shoulder, or tell me she was going to rip him. If she had said I think his shoulders are stuck I would have said no. - She had no consent to rip him from me. It was also part of my birth request that I catch my baby and bring him up to me she took this from me too.
Post-birth	<p>Disrespectful, negligent and dangerous care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No observations done - Left sitting sobbing for shower, in sheets and bluey I birthed in with an open wound for 2 hrs awaiting surgery - Left me alone for the majority of that wait for surgery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if the photographer hadn't stayed with me I would have been alone as my partner was in NICU. I could have haemorrhaged. - When the midwife finally returned she got my partner to wash me - she was too busy to do it. - . Washed half of my right foot when I begged for sponge bath then told my husband to do the rest. - Refused to let me go to NICU

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor communication and lacked empathy, never asked how I was, what my baby's name was .
Ward, discharge and outpatient follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bedside debrief was rushed and again I felt unheard. I felt the Senior Resident (SRMO) was telling me what happened during my birth. She did not listen to me when I told my birth story. - Inconsistent care and not believed re perineal pain and possible abscess - Had to beg for pain relief, and I felt like I must not cope well with pain. I now know I was in pain because I had an abscess. - Mental health concerns dismissed, not taken seriously - Have to advocate for myself to get appropriate care - Burden on me to follow up and "reduce risk" when I have no strength to do any of it. - Minimal mental health support and follow-up when I have symptoms of depression, anxiety and trauma.

Current state/ Impacts

- The action of the midwife resulted in me sustaining a 3B tear. This level of tearing in a third-time mother is exceptionally rare. Approx 2-4% of first-time mums will experience this level of tearing; it is extremely uncommon for this to occur during subsequent births and without forceps. I have no doubt in my mind that the midwife's actions caused my birth injury.
- I have daily community nurse visits for packing of the wound. I am on 2 types of antibiotics which have caused vomiting, nausea and diarrhoea. I am taking 2 anti-nausea medications and gastro stop.
- I have been in pain constantly for over a month.
- I am incontinent.
- I have this injury for life. It will impact my levels of continence, pain, sexual function, physical activity for life. We do not feel done with our family - but this injury impacts on my ability to remain continent through a pregnancy and my options for birthing another baby. I also should not have to birth at this hospital again.
- I am very mentally unwell, have needed to see psychologists, social work and begun on medication. This will be ongoing.
- My eldest two children have been separated from me again and needed to go to Sydney to be cared for by grandparents. My daughter has missed more school and my son more preschool. Their routine has been disrupted and they miss me. I miss them .
- My partner and parents have had to take more time off work to care for me and for my children.
- I am on medication for postnatal depression. I think about running away daily.
- I have nightmares and flashbacks daily.

- I can't stop picturing the face of the midwife. I want to scream "I was nice to you and you violated me and didn't even care enough to clean me!"
- I walked out of that hospital a shell of myself. I am not the same person who walked in there.
- I had a vagina and vulva I loved. It looked good and it worked really well. Now I feel dirty and violated at my core.
- I have had to fight hard and advocate hard to be heard. I have had to fight to get basic health care and mental health follow up.

What I want

I'm asking for a debrief with the people involved in my care. I want my complaints to be heard and understood. I want to know why what happened to me, happened.

The reason I have this tear is because someone acted in panic, outside the scope of their practice, and outside the policies of their hospital. I believe she could not tell the difference between the cardinal movements of birth and shoulder dystocia. I believe she panicked. Regardless, shoulder dystocia is an obstetric emergency and if she did think this could have been occurring, she still acted against every policy by attempting to delivery without one other person in the room. She should have pressed the emergency button.

The hospital has someone working who does not know the difference between a normal and obstetric emergency.

I also found out that she had read GBS results wrong incorrectly, stating negative GBS, which resulted in her failing to give me IV antibiotics, and exposing my baby to Strep-B, which can be deadly. This is an unacceptable error. This error caused me to be anxious, and fearful for my baby's health. It added another level of trauma and mistrust for this health facility and this individual.

I was discharged from hospital with an untreated abscess and without being assessed by the appropriate surgery team. I had to beg for pain relief and was made to feel it was unnecessary and that it was just me.

I want to know what the hospital is doing about it. I want to know exactly what action will be taken with the individual midwife to ensure this doesn't happen to another person. All they said they will do is talk to her, but that is inadequate.

I want acknowledgement that this was not normal, that it was wrong. I want them to own it.