

Submission  
No 1100

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Mrs Lana Middleby

**Date Received:** 14 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

## Lana Middleby Birth and Care Story of 19 October 2016

Birth Trauma Inquiry Submission 14 August 2023

I was given the opportunity to have a debrief with the manager of the Midwifery Group Practise where I experienced my first and traumatic birth. I was then invited to share my birth story with her which she would go on to use as a learning exercise with the group of midwives to understand what went wrong and how to avoid that happening again. The following reflection is what she inserted before my story to read to the group. What follows is my birth story, written by me.

*Birth Story for reflection from a first time mother. The woman was in her early 30's and she expressed that she had always been excited about how it would be to be pregnant, give birth and become a mother. Her choice was to have care within a continuity model and was excited to have been given a placement in the Midwifery Group Practice where she had a known midwife who supported her birth choices while planning and empowering her to have a natural birth.*

During the Pregnancy: I went into labour with regular contractions at 35 weeks around 2am. I called my midwife who advised I come into the hospital. I presented at the ward around 6am. By the time I was given a bed and seen to, the contractions had stopped but I was given Panadeine Forte anyway which I was told was to stop the contractions. I had avoided any drugs/caffeine/alcohol the entire pregnancy so was very hesitant to take this and had to repeatedly question the Midwife ( ), from here on in referred to as Midwife ( ) about why I was taking it and the risks/benefits. Information was difficult to get but once things were explained by another midwife ( ) and I was given information of how the drug worked to stop contractions and why it was prescribed I felt comfortable that it was the right decision. I was still left confused as to why this information was so hard to receive and why it was something I had to ask. I later went home and the pregnancy remained normal for another 5 weeks.

On my due date: I once again felt regular contractions, I called my midwife ( ) in the early evening to just let her know I felt like I was in early labour. ( ) was not on duty so on-call midwife answered the phone who happened to be Midwife ( ) from my short hospital visit at 35 weeks. Midwife ( ) advised I take panadeine forte and go to bed. Due to being given this to stop labour earlier in the pregnancy, I thought Midwife ( ) was mistaken and needed to stop the labour. I informed Midwife ( ) that it was in fact my due date and there was no need to take it or to stop the contractions. Midwife ( ) disregarded this and again advised to take the panadeine and rest. I said I am not in pain and didn't want to take anything in my labour, want to feel labour and I am excited to birth. Midwife ( ) again disregarded this, informed me that if it's true labour then it won't stop it and advised to take the panadeine and go to bed. I expressed that I had already discussed with my midwife that I did not want to use any pain relief and wanted a natural birth. I repeated that I was not even in pain now and didn't want to use pain relief either way. Midwife ( ) disregarded everything I said and insisted I take the panadeine.

Feeling as though Midwife knew best and that I was not given any other choice or respect in my own decision making, I reluctantly took 2 panadeine that I already had at home from a previous surgery and despite it being only 7pm I went to relax in bed with my partner, as directed. They were 30mg of codeine. **(\*She did not think to check if it was out of date or what the dosage was, which should be considered by all midwives when telling vulnerable, labouring women at home to take prescription drugs without guidance\*)**. I wanted an active upright labour but Midwife convinced me I had to lie down and get some rest.

Thinking back to when the drug stopped the same labour sensations at 35 weeks, I didn't want this to happen again so I thought to use some clary sage oil to ensure things kept progressing. Her partner applied some oil to her feet in a massage, the oil was undiluted and I remember the aroma of the oil filling the room and immediately went from having dull contractions 5mins apart to extremely intense 1min contractions 3mins or less apart. This made me feel instant discomfort and felt out of control and frustrated that these 2 things had interrupted my otherwise happy and comfortable beginning to labour. I tried to use the bath to relax and get in the zone and be comfortable but at the same time the panadeine forte kicked in which made me completely lethargic, uncomfortable and unable to keep my eyes open. I was very upset by this and wanted to settle into labour and be where I needed to be to birth so I called the midwife again and requested to go to the birthing centre.

I did not get to experience my labour progressing naturally which was my expectation for my birth.

My known midwife decided to come into to meet me despite not being on call and was present with me when I arrived. I really loved Midwife and her support throughout my pregnancy and appreciated her coming in to meet me. She made me feel welcome and respected my wishes for a natural birth. My room was kept dim and my privacy respected. She ran me a bath and but was unable to get comfortable in there as I was so knocked out by the codeine and couldn't keep my eyes open. The room was incredibly cold. I was offered morpheine which I have never had in my life, I was told it would help me sleep but I would still contract through the night. I had no idea what to do so I said ok. I remember sleeping and being woken slightly by contractions happening through the night. Looking back I feel sad that my body and baby were ready to birth but I was stuck sleeping on my side for hours on end while my baby was trying to naturally move into natural birthing position and this was stolen by the effect of the drugs. In the morning I woke and felt refreshed and happy that the drugs had completely worn off and I was excited to let labour continue naturally. Unfortunately the labour had completely stopped. It was at this point that my Midwife had to leave, wished me well and Midwife entered the room.

She literally walked in, clapped her hands and said "right, lets get this baby out!". At this moment I immediately felt my space disrupted and my ownership of my birth taken away. It was inappropriate high energy and the attitude of "lets get this baby out" (quoted from the midwife) was in no way caring, connecting and made me instantly feel uncomfortable. Interventions were used to start labour again without the presence of mind to keep the atmosphere private and quiet to induce the natural flow of oxytocin and labour. I was now on the clock and being observed and monitored which is not conducive to labour. She rudely suggested in a joking way, from across the other side of the room as if it were nothing - that my husband "do some nipple tweaking". I was in the bath trying to switch off and get in the zone to get labour going... and once again

again, doing as we were told, my husband got in the bath and started tweaking my nipples. It was the most inappropriate and uncomfortable situation I've ever been in. My mum had also just arrived and was sitting there awkwardly trying not to look as this played out. I think I asked him to stop but I was in no shape to express my discomfort and suggest that it was not in any way intimate (if that's what she was thinking) therefore not at all going to get any oxytocin flowing.

It was discussed that my waters should be broken to get labour started again. I consented to this as it was the only way I thought things could progress from there. Once this was done, I went to get into the shower hoping this would give me some privacy and be relaxing and labour would surely get going. The floor was uncomfortable so I asked for some of the kneeling pads or towels and Midwife said no they had none left. I was very uncomfortable on the hard floor and once again couldn't settle into labour. I can't remember at what stage it was but I also had a student midwife present who was extremely supportive and I appreciated her presence and kindness very much. Midwife had instructed her to perform something to do with one of the injections or the canular as a learning opportunity. The student was unsure about something and not able to do it exactly right and Midwife snapped at her and spoke very rudely to her and patronised her about how she should be able to do (whatever to task was) properly. Once again my mind was taken from my birth.

At this point it must have been around midday. Labour was not beginning again so it was discussed that I get the syntocinon drip to initiate labour. After a very long night and day contractions finally started again. I naturally wanted to be upright for birth and was using the small mattress on the floor to kneel on and lean on the bed and then went un onto the bed to kneel and lean over the back of the bed. I was excited that the birth was near and determined to settle into labour and allow my baby to come out.

Up until this point my mum (who had travelled all the way up from Sydney that morning) was welcome to be in the room and was sitting on the sidelines. She must have been in and out of the room for whatever reason which was not a worry for me but all of a sudden Midwife very abruptly said "you're either in or out"!! This made me feel so upset that my mum was being spoken to like this and I immediately was taken away from my birth and my head was back into the room again. Because my mum then felt uncomfortable and unwelcome, she sat in the first chair she found which was at the end of the bed. Mum and I had previously discussed that mum was not going to be at that end, she didn't need to actually view the baby coming out and was just there to be with me and witness birth.

I started feeling the urge to push (which I now know that this is the involuntary Fetal Ejection Reflex) but Midwife instructed me to lay on my side and said not to push. Again, following instructions, I used every cell in my body to slow my breath enough to stop my body from pushing. Once again - my baby wanted to come out and this was stopped! I lay there for a long time while Midwife was feeling my contractions on my stomach and not saying anything at all as to why I needed to resist the urge to push. I was eventually told that I can start pushing which I did for a while while still lying on my right side. After a while Midwife then instructed me to lay on my back - This was the one thing I did not want to do but at this point I was completely unable to construct any words to communicate or debate this.

I was now on my back being directed to push for quite some time. Midwife kept repeating "here he comes" and kept telling me to push as hard as I possibly can. I was

pushing so hard it felt like my ribs were going to break. At one point Midwife very excitedly exclaimed to me “oh look your pushing out colostrum” as if everything wasn’t intense and confusing enough, I was now being made aware that something was coming out of my nipples.

Midwife had my right knee brought up towards my side and she instructed my husband to do the same with my other knee. My husband quickly handed his phone to my mum and told her to take the video that he had just hit record for. My mum doesn’t know how to use an iPhone and also didn’t want to be a bother again so she held the phone as it was recording unknowingly with the flash light on. This was shining right in my eyes and I had no idea why so I was saying turn the torch off. I don’t think she really knew what to do at this point, my husband may have taken the phone back off her after I told him to stop the light shining in my face.

After still pushing as hard as I possibly could for so long and still being told “here he comes” (the baby’s head was visible, but had not crowned yet). Midwife asked if I wanted to touch his head and I said no, she said ohh why not and grabbed my hand and put it down there anyway. I felt the babies head and was unsure what to think about it. She kept saying here he comes so I kept pushing as hard as I could despite not feeling any movement from my baby or any progression in his descent. It was like there was no baby there and I was just clenching my torso and pushing “from my bum” (to quote Midwife ) as hard as I could.

At this point this had been going on for at least an hour and it was very distressing. My mum, who was too scared to leave the room due to the midwives previous instructions, suddenly said that she didn’t feel well. I instantly knew that mum was going to faint (as she has in the past) and knew she must lay on the floor to prevent fainting or an injury so I said “get mum on the little mattress on the floor”. Midwife snapped back that mum must sit on the other chair beside the bed. I said NO, she needs to lie down so she doesn’t faint. Midwife again said no just sit on the chair over there. My husband then went to over to help mum to the other chair as she was not able to walk on her own and Midwife then snapped at my husband to get back over and help hold my knee up as I was having another contraction. I was unable to talk for that contraction and was pushing (while holding my breath as I was forcing so hard) so as soon as that contraction finished I said mum needs to be on the mattress. Mum was now on the chair beside my bed fainting while sitting up and making strange noises as one does when they’re being forced to sit up while fainting. This was SO distressing and frustrating for me seeing my mum being treated like this and for Midwife to be arguing with me in between contractions/pushing. I knew what was best for my mother and the situation. Midwife even joked about it and “said oh listen to you calling out instructions” or something along those lines. An experienced nurse/midwife should know that to avoid fainting you must elevate your legs! By this time my student midwife had had to go home but a student doctor was called in to help carry my mum to another room.

I continued to push like this, in total it was about an hour and a half of forced pushing on my back, with out any indication that anything was wrong or not how it should be OR any suggestion to change positions to assist the baby moving down. I was incredibly distressed at this stage and was expecting to feel some kind of sensation of her baby crowning since the midwife kept repeating "here he comes" for over an hour. I was also aware that the doctors had been trying to come in as it had been such a long time, but the Midwife repeatedly kept sending them away.

Had I of been informed by the Midwife that my baby was not in optimal position for decent and not progressing through the birth canal, I would not have been distressed and confused as to why the baby wasn't coming out and would have moved to an upright position to let gravity assist the natural way of birth. I also would have expected an experienced midwife to get me in an upright position and off my back to use gravity to assist the baby out if he was not successfully moving out after all that time.

The Doctor and his team finally came into the room, as soon as he did he calmly greeted me and respectfully informed me that "my baby was stuck" at which point I thought (and was relieved to get some sort of change or assistance) that I now had no choice but to go for a c-section to get the baby out. I was in complete despair. The Doctor then informed me that he only needed to do an episiotomy or use the ventouse, to which I said just do whatever you can, I remember crying out "just get it out"!! I was extremely grateful and relieved that I had been informed about what was happening and what her options were by the Doctor and that **this should have been disclosed by the midwife well before it got to this stage**. The Doctor immediately went got to work, the vibe in the room instantly improved when I knew something was being done about my situation. I was so happy to be getting helped. The ventouse was applied to the babies head and remember feeling a jolt and that was all that was needed for the head to finally pop out and the ventouse was no longer needed. This is something I am upset about as an upright birth position and gravity would have had the same effect and avoided the distress of lying on her back pushing a stuck baby for a lengthy and unnecessary amount of time. Everyone cheered, the Doctor told me to have a rest and get ready to push on the next contraction. Then all of a sudden I was pushing for the last time and out came my baby. It was the most excruciating and shocking sensation I have ever experienced. My body was in total shock and since it didn't have any time to stretch as his head didn't crown, I tore badly as he came out. He was on my chest, absolute relief and everyone was cheering. Midwife kept saying "that was all you" and cheering and said "that was the least ventouse ventouse Ive ever seen" and being inappropriately jovial and jokey. Meanwhile I was on the bed in tears in complete agony and in shock.

In one of the appointments with my Midwife during the pregnancy, I was asked if I wanted to have the syntocin injection at birth to assist the placenta delivery, I chose not to and it was agreed and noted in my file. When the baby was coming out, I clearly remember Midwife leaning in and jabbing my thigh the syntocin injection. I was distressed with the abrupt exit of my baby while being torn simultaneously and additionally confused about the injection suddenly happening. I remember saying before she jabbed it in, that I had chosen not to have that. Midwife disregarded my comment and insisted that since I had already had the syntocin drip it won't make a difference so that's what had to be done. I was left with a large bruise on my thigh and when Midwife saw it at my postnatal home appointment she said, "I've never seen that happen before in all my time of doing it" which I thought to be strange and as if Midwife was defending her abrupt efforts to jab the needle in. I was also upset that with all that was going on, the trauma of the baby coming out and simultaneously tearing, that I was also jabbed with a needle that I had not consented to **AND was argued with by the midwife**.

I was incredibly thankful for the Doctor for how he explained everything that was happening, informed me about My choices and was calm, careful and respectful with his actions.

After Birth: I was in shock immediately after the birth and was being checked and sutured while I had the baby on my chest. At some stage during this time Midwife leant in and told (**not asked!**) Me that she was "giving the baby the Hep B vaccination now". Despite being in the most vulnerable situation of my life I still had the presence of mind to say a very firm NO, I had declined the Hep B vaccination and this was agreed upon and noted with my midwife during pregnancy. Midwife was quoted to then say "why" in a very condescending way. I felt I should not have to defend or argue my decision in that state but I remained firm that I had declined the vaccination. It was also in my records that I did not consent to Hep B at Birth or the Syntocin injection. Despite all of this, Midwife gave the reasons why he should have it and gave the baby the Hep B vaccination anyway. This was unethical, negligent and disrespectful that my AND myr baby had now been given injections that they had not given consent to.

Due to the vontouse being used I was admitted with my baby for an overnight stay. The following morning after the shock of birth and disrupted sleep, I woke up in a fair amount of pain. I walked out to the front desk in the ward and was standing there while the girl on the desk was on her phone. I waited and she eventually looked up. I asked if I can have some pain relief, she asked what room I was in and I said I don't know. I was in no state to again be going back and forth about details so instead of asking my name and finding out my room number she said, how don't you know your room? And I said I just dont know, Im down there. She said I should have pressed the buzzer. I had no idea to do that and again, was probably still in shock. I think she said shell bring some to my room. I wandered up to the refreshments room and was standing there, burst into tears and a staff member came in and said are you ok? I said no, they seemed surprised like it was unexpected for someone on the maternity ward to be crying. It was a strange experience. Following that, we all went home that day and fell completely in love with our baby and I couldn't have been happier to put that entire experience behind me and enjoy my new baby.

Postnatal Visit: Midwife attended one of the home visits in the following week. During the appointment Midwife gave the baby the heal prick test which made the baby scream uncontrollably. I was not expecting this and comforting baby, I got my breast out to feed the baby for comfort when she felt it was right. Midwife grabbed hold of the babys head and was forcing his mouth onto the breast, not allowing the baby to have a clear mouth to suck in air between screams and almost muffling the baby. This was incredibly distressing once again and felt strange, but the midwife insisted in all her 20 years she had not had that kind of reaction before, insinuating that my baby was overreacting or that she hadn't actually hurt the baby. She did not show any empathy or acknowledgement that that actually hurt the baby.

During the visit Midwife reflected back to the birth, as if for her own personal debrief. She said to me that the doctors were trying to come in and were asking for numbers or a report of some sort, in a very disregarding way insinuating that it was actually unnecessary for them to be doing so as if she had it all under control. **She said that "she has been a midwife for 20 years and didn't need to look at the numbers". This is very frustrating as the doctors clearly knew something wasn't right but Midwife was denying them access and was now defending herself for her own benefit which seemed to be very unprofessional and un-empathetic.** Then she went on to say that in hindsight she should have tried having me lay on my left side as well as

my right side and on my back. Saying that would of got his head around that bend. As if I had a crooked birth canal. **This still infuriates me and is a complete contradiction to her previous statement that she has been a midwife for 20 years and knows what she is doing. I always wonder if she had of been able to get back onto my knees, if my baby would have been delivered faster with gravity and without trauma and stress.**

Towards what felt like the end of the appointment, during some small talk while Midwife packed up, I mentioned that my husband was a builder. Midwife turned all her attention to the him who was in the kitchen nearby and for around 30mins discussed her home renovation plans and other aspects of her personal life. The visit was nearing an hour and a half, I was incredibly tired and upset at this point and was patiently waiting for Midwife to redirect her attention to me and to end the appointment. I didn't get a change to get a word in let alone suggest that I was ready to rest and end the appointment. This was highly unprofessional and un-empathetic and should not at all have been discussed by Midwife who should have known better.

Conclusion: If I had experienced only one of the incidents that I have shared, I could have possibly let it go. Although, it was a large repetitive series of unfortunate, disrespectful and unprofessional events that should not have happened and that completely strayed from the MGP program of empowering the woman to birth naturally with respect and focus on me and my family. Midwife assumed control and ownership from the first call in labour to the post natal visit and did not act in a way that was centred on me and my family at any time. I have had to work very hard on my mental health surrounding all of this and letting any negative feelings go so I was able to go back to the birth centre with a positive mind and birth my second baby. I requested Midwife was not to be in contact with me at any stage of my second experience at that hospital. I was so pleased to then go on to have an incredible, undisturbed second birth in the same room and recover mentally from that first traumatic experience.

Signed

Lana Middleby

14 August 2023