

Submission
No 1121

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

NSW birth trauma Inquiry

Birth one

- At each appointment with my obstetrician, I felt unsupported in my desire to have a natural unmedicated birth. I felt like I had to really push my words out and had to push to have an uninterrupted birth. I really felt that I needed to back myself 150% to have a natural unmedicated birth. I didn't trust that my obstetrician had my best interests at heart. I didn't change providers as I assumed this was just how it was.

- My Obstetrician offered a stretch and sweep in late pregnancy. Maybe around 37 weeks. When I asked him what it was and why, he said "oh some women just like to get them done". He did not give me information on this procedure. I felt pressured to have one, despite not knowing what a stretch and sweep was, what the reason was, was it medically necessary (it wasn't) and what the possible risks would be. He said to sit on the bed in his office and he did a vaginal examination that day which in hindsight was completely unnecessary to have the doctors fingers inside my vagina and left me feeling that he had the power in this situation and not me. He also said that we couldn't do a stretch and sweep as my cervix was closed. He never gave a reason as to why he thought I should have a stretch and sweep or a vaginal examination.

- During appointments with my obstetrician, I made it very clear that I wanted to have a natural birth with no intervention unless medically necessary. However I did ask for some information if I were to need a c-section. It was dismissed, because I would likely not need a c-section. I had a c-section.

- I went into labour naturally and during the time I was at home, I made two phone calls to the hospital to keep them updated out of respect to their staff so they could plan ahead knowing that I may come in. The staff member who picked up the phone was rude, dismissive and told me not to call and to just turn up. This left me with severe anxiety. I was completely unsupported by the hospital I was about to birth at at this point. My labour stopped. I arrived at hospital in tears with extreme anxiety and felt unsupported. I was told my baby's heart rate was not as it should have been (I can't recall the exact words). The obstetrician said we had three options: "1) to do nothing, which I would not recommend, 2) to induce or 3) to have a c-section. It's not an emergency, we can wait 30 minutes or so" we had nearly no information on these options so asked what he would do if it were his child and he said a c-section. So I had a c-section.

- No real information given for what to expect for C-section or afterwards.

- After my c-section, I was left in a room, I think it was the operating theatre as there was someone cleaning up after C-section as I lay there by myself. I was WITHOUT MY BABY FOR AROUND AN HOUR after I gave birth. I had the shakes. No one attended to me to explain why I wasn't with my baby or what to expect. I was basically by myself for an hour while my baby was having skin to skin with her dad. No one explained why this happened, or that this was not how it should be. I felt depressed and extremely anxious after the birth of my first baby. There was a huge impact on mother-baby bonding which negatively impacted the beginning of my life as a mother and my ability to mother my child. I felt disconnected from my baby for a long time.

Second birth

- I hired an obstetrician that specialises in VBACs and even still, I felt I had to educate myself and advocate for myself to have a natural unmedicated birth.

- During labour at the hospital, my obstetrician threatened a C-section despite baby and mother being very happy and statistics backed this up, midwives and OB backed this up as well. The reason was because my labour was not progressing as fast as he wanted. His midwife said I should have a vaginal exam to make sure I was dilating the right amount for his expectations (hospital's time limit). So I agreed that the midwife could do a vaginal exam despite not wanting one because I didn't want an unnecessary c-section. Unbelievable that I had to accept having someone else's fingers inside my vagina to avoid having major surgery when mother and baby were happy and healthy.
- Continuous fetal monitor kept moving around (I even hired a doula who constantly moved it back in place and held it in place to keep the staff happy). A midwife told baby's dad and me that if I just have a little clip put on baby's head I'll have all the time in the world to labor. This "clip" was to be used because the continuous monitor is not fit for a labouring woman. The midwife didn't explain what the fetal scalp electrode actually was but thankfully I knew and declined. I had a successful unmedicated VBAC.

To think that I had to advocate so hard for myself simply to birth the way the body intended is a sign the system needs an overhaul. The situations, comments and details listed above caused me trauma following the births of my children. They left me feeling helpless and particularly after birth one, having severe mental health problems because of what happened during my pregnancy, birth and postpartum.

Note that this was written while caring full time for two very young children so is written to the best of my ability in these circumstances. It's also very difficult to relive traumatic situations.

Thank you for reading.