

Submission
No 998

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Birth Trauma Submission NSW Inquiry -

My Daughter was born in November 2021, during covid and most of my pregnancy was spent in lockdown. Some parts of my pregnancy care, my birth and my postpartum were amazing. Other parts I replay in my mind daily and I consider myself one of the lucky ones. After some false starts in the system, we decided to have a planned home birth with a PPM, at 37+6 I developed preeclampsia and unfortunately had to be admitted to hospital

I'm in a fairly unique position as I work both within the hospital system in a corporate role and also as an acupuncturist in private practice working exclusively with pregnancy and birth. One thing I was clear about at the start of my pregnancy was my desire for a normal physiological birth and the importance continuity of midwifery care plays as part of achieving that. I applied for the MGP program at my local hospital and was told it was already full (I phoned them at 6 weeks pregnant) I went on the waitlist. I then explored the option of hiring a private obstetrician, I tried to find the most naturally minded OB, I lasted 2 appointments with her, when she started to talk about induction at the 12 week appointment and that I was not allowed to birth in the water, I decided to change care providers again. I'd managed to convince my partner that we should look at finding a home birth midwife. I phoned every midwife in Sydney and surrounds and everyone was booked up. At this point I was devastated, I was yet to have an appointment at my local hospital as due to covid all appointments had been pushed back, I had one appointment at 16 weeks and that lasted for 12 minutes the midwife told me I was in the higher BMI range (I was a size 8 prior to pregnancy) and at risk of GD and even though I'd refused the test I should probably just comply as they will keep asking me at every appointment. Again another realisation that scattered care is not for me. I again emailed every midwife in Sydney desperate to find a private practice midwife.

My follow up appointment got cancelled due to covid lockdowns and I had it over the phone. Thankfully at 22 weeks one of the local PPM's replied to my email and had some availability in November as she had scheduled in a holiday and due to lockdown was no longer able to go.

Finally at the 24 week mark my care changed, for the remaining 14 weeks I felt so supported, informed, cared for, safe and content. I had an incredible midwife, we had hour long appointments either in our home to hers, my partner and I trusted her, connected with her and felt so incredibly lucky to have found her, but also so grateful that we could afford the privilege. Private midwifery care is incredible and it should be a right and not a privilege.

Our experience in the public hospital system was mixed, I felt lucky that we had a midwife who was experienced in physiological birth and made it a priority. For example, she went to put the cervidil and actually didn't need to as I was already 2-3cm dilated and could perform a Stretch and sweet. Everything she did was in the aim of being as low intervention as we possible could be.

Here is a serif list of some of the things that happened or were said to me in hospital that I still think about today.

1. The first midwife who was taking my blood pressure and asked about how I'd like to birth, told me I wouldn't be allowed to have a water birth. This stayed with me and I wasn't even sure if it was accurate, but it meant I didn't use the bath. And two things I wonder that may have been different if she had not have said that to me and I didn't use the bath. I had a 2nd degree tear, would that have happened if I'd been permitted to use the tub to soften the perineum? And second; My daughter swallowed meconium and was in special care for 5 days. if I was in the bath for her birth, could the water prevented her inhaling it at all?
2. The midwife we had for the birth, who was fantastic and we had formed a trust with in such a short amount of time. She went for a sleep for 3hours as she had had a busy shift prior. I was asking for her and none of the staff woke her as they didn't believe I was in active labour. When I demanded they get her, I birthed my bay within the hour. She then asked me why no-one woke her up earlier? My labour was around 6hrs all up, my partner and I managed alone, but I wonder what it would have been like to have someone else there, seeing as neither my midwife or doula could be with me due to COVID restrictions.

3. arrived at 6:55am, 7am is change of shift. Once she was born a whole lot of new mi came into the room. One had told me it was time to get on the bed and that I'd had my golden hour. I trusted her, but looking back on the photos she lied to me as it had only been 20 mins. I was made to get on the bed, I'd asked for delayed cord clamping, they told me the cord was white and it was time to cut the chord. Looking back on the photos it had only been around 30mins. Interestingly following the cutting of the cord is when my baby started having respiratory issues, at the time of birth her APTGAR were 9 & 9. I wonder if it would have made any difference to keep her placenta attached for longer. Perhaps not, but again something I didn't want and in the moment you get coerced into it.

4. We'd said no to vitamin K, the nurse suggested we try the needle version to see if it would wake her up a bit and improve her vitals. I don't even know if this is a thing, but I consented to it in that moment.

5. Then a Dr came in to stitch me up, I said id prefer not to have stitches and to let it heal naturally. They said it's a clean tear and will be easy to fix, again I'm not sure why but I consented to stitches. They then offered pain relief, to which I declined. They then said we can do an internal or a local or something. Again I consented! Why do they not accept our first word NO?! Why do they keep pushing and then in the moment there is so much going on and we just say ok. This is not consent this is coercion.

6. In the special care nursery they Dr's nor to consultant could cannulate my baby, they kept trying and trying and she had so many bruises and needle marks on her hands and her feet.

7. I was also told by a nurse that I couldn't hold my baby as she'd already been through a lot and needed to rest. What she needed was to be on my chest. Thankful I wouldn't accept No for an answer and kept asking, but it took a few hours. I felt like I let me baby down by not being assertive enough, but getting swept up in it all and standing back rather than advocating for what I knew to be best for her. She needed skin to skin with me, she needed to be close and for the first 12-24hrs, I didn't fight for her enough. And I feel really bad about that. But also, why should I have had to, why shouldn't skin to skin be the best place for her. She was on a C-pap. But she was able to be on that and on my chest as we did it for the rest of the time.

8. Then on the ward I was put into a room with another bed, this made me nervous as I didn't want another mother coming in with her baby when I didn't have mine. There were plenty of private rooms free, I couldn't understand why they didn't give one to me. In addition I had private obstetric health insurance that apparently I wasn't able to use as I didn't have an obstetrician. A few days after being in the room, another mother and her baby were put in with me. I remember coming back from the special care nursery with my baby for the first time and finding the blinds drawn and a women and her partner who had the most intense aftershave on in the room. All I wanted to do was enjoy the time with my baby and my partner for the first time and the room was dark and we had to be quiet. In the end we sat in the community room with some daylight celebrating that our baby was able to come out of the special care nursery. It was devastating. In the end I didn't feel comfortable in that room and it made me so stressed out my blood pressure spiked and I asked a nurse if I could be moved to come of the free private rooms. The nusrse said to me. "Those rooms are for special circumstances and you've had it pretty good so far" I couldn't undertand if my baby is in the special care and I have pre-eclampsia why I wasn't considered a special case? In the end I became so distressed I just stayed in the special care nursery with my baby. My partner ended up appealing to the incharge to get me moved on compassionate grounds.

9. One day prior to my release a discharge nurse had to get my permission to release me into the care of my private midwife. She then decided to tell me that the rules change yesterday and had I birthed a few days later then my midwife or doula could have been with me. I can't help but wonder if I had of had at least one of my additional support people present that I had paid for their expertise how many of the above situation would have unfolded.

10. My final thought, I work as an allied health practitioner in the area of pregnancy and birth and I hear stories all day long from women about their past birth trauma or I watch along from the sidelines as the fragmented care and hospital policy get in the way of empowering women to trust

their bodies, to trust birth and trust their babies. It's heartbreaking and things need to change now.