

Submission
No 1000

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My name is _____ and I suffer from birth trauma and PTSD after the birth of my beautiful daughter _____, on May 21, 2021. I am currently 30 weeks pregnant with my second baby girl and despite being overjoyed to welcome a new baby into our family, the memories from my first birth experience haunt me often. Although I carry these memories with me for the rest of my life, I am hopeful that second time around, I can write a vastly different story to the one I share with you now.

At the time of _____ birth, I was living with my husband in _____, a regional town _____ NSW. I participated in a shared care model between my local GP/OB and midwifery team at _____ Public Hospital. I knew very early on that birthing at _____ meant I needed to have zero risk factors, in accordance with ACMI guidelines and the resources of the hospital. My pregnancy was straightforward and there were no adverse indicators known to my doctors and midwives that would need me to birth elsewhere. After a stretch and sweep at 40+3, I went into spontaneous labour in the early hours of the morning on May 20, 2021. After several hours labouring at home, the midwives encouraged me to come into the birthing suite due to the intensity and frequency of the contractions.

After fifteen hours of labour and morphine for pain relief, I did not progress. I was experiencing obstructed labour and requested an epidural for pain management. I was advised by the midwives that they only have anaesthetists on call, so I would have to wait for one to be available. He was over an hour away. When he finally arrived, I felt relieved. It was unacceptable I had to wait so long and unfortunately for me, the epidural failed. Despite expressing my concerns that I could no longer feel the right side of my body or my legs when the epidural was first administered, I was assured that it was 'normal' and that it would fix itself up. It did not correct itself and my concerns felt dismissed, even though I repetitively told my care team that I could still feel my contractions and could no longer move the lower half of my body.

By this point in time, I was exhausted and deflated. I felt as though no one was truly trying to help me and get this baby out. I was frustrated, powerless, in pain and I really struggled to feel supported by my care team. Given my obstructed labour and my heightening levels of stress, _____ Hospital could no longer meet my needs. My OB requested a transfer to _____ or _____ Hospital, as he did not (and legally could not), intervene in any way, as I was now a high-risk birthing woman. _____ Hospital lacked obstetric and theatre coverage and the resources needed. Despite his efforts and to our disgust, both hospitals refused to admit me as they were full. I felt like a burden and that there was nothing that could be done. I felt hopeless, fearful and was in unimaginable pain. Now there was a risk to myself and my baby, and I genuinely thought I was going to die.

It is completely unacceptable that hospitals in NSW can be so under resourced that our skilled doctors and midwives are unable to do their job effectively. Having to rely on other hospitals to take their patients not only undermines their professionalism and training, but creates an extra burden on other hospitals. The World Health Organisation claims that women have the right to perinatal care close to their home. This wasn't the case for me. Despite several calls to both hospitals, they were fully booked and unable to accommodate me until the next day. The following morning, May 21, _____ Hospital agreed to take me after approximately

thirty hours of labour. I was paralysed from the hips down, unable to walk or move, but could still feel all my contractions. I was transported by ambulance, lights and sirens for a forty-five-minute trip to Hospital. Not only was I exhausted, but the adrenaline was pumping, and my stress levels had increased dramatically. What I needed in this moment, was someone to tell me it was all going to be okay. The mental game was horrendous and to make it worse, they wouldn't allow my husband to ride in the ambulance with me. He had been by my side the whole time. He was my rock, my advocate, my hope when I felt like I was dying and no one else could help me. He had to make the forty-five-minute drive on his own and I could only imagine the stress and worry he must have felt on that journey, as his wife was whisked away in a medical emergency. That ambulance ride alone is one of the main memories that haunt me to this day. Being separated from the one I loved,, in a time where I was most vulnerable made me feel hopeless and fearful amongst a terror of pain. What was going to happen to me and my baby?

Upon arrival at hospital, I was assigned a single student midwife who did a wondrous job given the state I was in. My waters were broken and labour continued to progress slowly. I was given the forms to sign for an emergency c section and was counting down the minutes and seconds until 11:30am, when I was due to be transferred to theatre. I remember screaming so loudly and feeling as though an alien was ripping me apart from the inside. My husband was finally able to be by my side and was ready for theatre, all dressed in his scrubs. We were almost ready to go to theatre when the midwife checked me and discovered baby's head was there, ready to go. As I still couldn't move my own body from the failed epidural, my husband and the sole midwife lifted one leg each. She guided my pushing and a team of student doctors rushed in to watch the event – albeit without my permission. was born through shoulder dystocia and was not breathing initially upon her arrival into the world. I also experienced a severe postpartum haemorrhage and second-degree tear. Had I not experienced such a long, traumatic labour, maybe these outcomes would have been vastly different.

My first birthing experience was horrific. I dread thinking about it and have found it difficult to be optimistic about the birth of my second child. However, I have done everything in my power to make a change for the better this time. I now live in , a small coastal town and have felt supported by my private obstetrician and psychologist, who couldn't believe what I had gone through. I have tackled EMDR therapy to try and minimise the traumatic memories and I am hopeful that this time will be different.

Things needs to change to ensure that we do better for all birthing women, regardless of their model of care or birth preferences. All hospitals need to be well funded and well-resourced to fully support birthing women in their time of need. All medical professionals also need to be transparent with their patients, so that women can make informed decisions about how and where they want to birth their babies. Birthing women need to feel supported and safe, where they can voice their concerns and feel heard and cared for. Birthing women need to be able to have complete trust in their care team, no matter the journey they may face, and all hospitals need to be equipped with the resources to meet their requests.