

Submission
No 1157

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My first baby was born in 2005 in [redacted], QLD. My pregnancy had been super low risk I was cared for by a wonderful group of Midwives through the Birth Centre but it all went pear shaped during my birth. Things progressed very quickly and as I arrived in the BC I was fully dilated and ready to have a baby. I vomited, my waters broke and on the doppler the babies heart rate had a bradycardia that didn't recover. Emergency bells were pressed as babies heart rate did not recover, then it did. And then down it went again. Heaps of people ran into the room. At this time the BC was separate from the hospital, the next minute I'm walking naked to the hospital birthing suite, outside with my husband trying to place a hand towel around my shoulders. Walking into a birth room, I was told to get up on the bed. Obviously by a man who has never been fully dilated with a baby about to be born feeling like I was completely unable to move. Lots of people came running in to the room and I was told to lie on my back and push. I had no pain relief. Next a ventouse was placed without consent into my vagina onto my babies head. Without consent. Without pain relief. I was screaming in pain, I was told to be quiet. I had a face cloth put in my mouth to mottle my screams, as I pushed and the Dr pulled. [redacted] was born with my husband standing next to me, having no idea what was going on. [redacted] was born, blue, white and floppy and the cord around his neck several times, the cord was cut and he was taken straight to the resuscitaire. No one told us what was happening and a bunch of people stood around the resus working on [redacted]. His Dad and I were left wondering if our baby was dead or alive. It seemed like forever that we heard nothing. And then a cry. No one told us what was happening and if our baby was OK. I got my baby back skin on skin, with no explanation. The Doctor never debriefed us to tell us what was happening. I also had a private Consultant and they didn't ring her to let her know I was there. I don't even remember now if I tore with that birth or not. My BC Midwife came to the birth suite soon after the birth and took us back to the BC...I did not process all of this until very recently when we started to discuss more and more at the birth trauma events. I was lucky, [redacted] didn't need to go to the nursery and stayed with us. We had a healthy baby. As far as I knew that was it and I had to behave like a good girl and not complain about the situation that unfolded.

I'm now a Midwife and sadly see this sort of event unfold all too often. I know now that I have vicarious trauma from experiencing so many other women's births, that unfold in all too similar fashions. I make it my job to try to explain what is happening in any emergency situation. But so many of these situations could be avoided. Sky rocketing inductions of labours taking place in the system to avoid a still birth when women are seeing fear induced registrars in late pregnancy. Poor women having the fear of God placed into them due to some risk factor that may have evolved, diet controlled diabetes, maternal obesity, post dates, IVF pregnancy, Twin pregnancy, the list goes on.

As a new graduate Midwife working at a large Sydney tertiary hospital, I would cry in fear before my shifts wondering what train wreck would evolve throughout my shift and if I would be able to cope with these events, having very little mentoring and assistance. How I have not left the profession in 5 years I do not know. I have been very close to burn out, trying to raise a family and work full time, post full time study over 3 years. But have had to keep going to enable me to put food on the table for my children. I have endured a marriage breakdown and the sudden death of my Father in the UK and still had to keep going.

I have worked in various models of care trying to give myself and my kids the best scenario of work life balance as a Midwife. A profession that I love. It is an absolute privilege to walk with women and families during the sacred rite of passage. I have worked in Midwifery Group practice, I have cared for pregnant women in custody. I have worked in birth suite, I have been on the other end in the postnatal wards and also now try to prepare families as best as I can as a labour and birth educator. Working as a Midwife is a tough gig. Dealing day to day with the fragility of life and death. Trying to do the best for all families in your care. As Midwives we are not paid accordingly or supported well enough to carry the intensity of the perinatal period.

The system is not preparing Midwives well enough, and spits them out at the end of their studies only to end up with traumatised Midwives left holding the hands of the women and babies. The system is not supporting women and families well enough. There could be so much more education through high school, ads, the media teaching people how to navigate the system. People do not know they have a voice or the right to decide in their care or understand the various options for their care. And we are not able to offer home birth to more women and families and have a community that fully understands home birth and the great evidence that supports great outcomes for families using this model of care.

I have seen and been part of amazing experiences where families are able to build a trusting relationship with a group of midwives, and wider care team. Where they feel safe and secure, with incredible outcomes. All women and families should have the opportunity to have great care. And come out of their birthing experiences feeling like they have conquered the world, not feeling like they have been tortured and unvalued, dehumanised and left holding a crying baby. We can do so much better.