

**Submission
No 1181**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Tamara Leetham

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Partially
Confidential

Submission

I am 15 months postpartum and still struggle with the trauma from the obstetric abuse I received at _____ Hospital every single day and I believe my child is deeply affected as well.

I was a hospital transfer from homebirth setting due to prolonged second stage, I did have a booking with the hospital as back up but had planned a homebirth with my private midwives in attendance.

My baby turned during labour to be posterior, their head was deep in the birth canal and visible from my vagina. When I arrived I was immediately placed on my back and the nurses went straight to put me on a drip to keep contractions going without observing me first, I did not need it because I was still contracting every couple of minutes and was not tired at all. Trainee specialist

_____ on staff that evening continually rammed her hands up my vagina without warning or consent even after having the hospital midwives and my private midwife raise their voices at her, telling her to give me some warning at least, and my private midwife tell her I'm a survivor of sexual assault so it is triggering. After my private midwife had told her this my spouse also reminded her to tell me what was happening and to ask consent before putting her hands/fingers inside to check my baby. However, she continued to do so. One of these times she said she felt the baby was starting to turn to be anterior and seemed hopeful things would progress.

My spouse was trying to speak with _____ continually ask her to stop ramming her hands inside me and touching me without telling me what was happening and the reason why I needed to be touched, they felt helpless and angry that everything they said was ignored as they were trying to do what they knew I would need and what was best for myself and our baby.

The atmosphere in the room was horrible but I was involuntarily pushing with my strong contractions, there were several staff at the end of the bed watching me which _____ would use as an excuse later for why she couldn't ask for my consent.

I was told that they would try vacuum with episiotomy, if that failed, forceps, and finally if that failed a caesarean. However, all would occur in the OR. They said for the episiotomy local anaesthetic would be given at the incision site and an epidural would be given if caesarean is needed. I signed the consent forms for this.

I consented to an oxygen test from my baby's scalp and the reading was within range, my private midwife said to me "that's good" immediately _____ said "that's not good" and my midwife argued against it, so _____ immediately retested, low and behold, the reading was suddenly at a dangerous level.

left the room to speak with the consultant, _____, who never saw me or read my notes and when she returned she said that I required a category 1 C-section because of this falsified reading.

The only reason I consented rather than proceeding with the other tools was because _____ didn't seem confident in her skills and I was afraid that she would do more damage to my baby due to her incompetence. I was wheeled to the OR and my spouse, Cassie, was taken to be gowned, I was reassured by the nurse/midwife that Cassie would be right behind me but when I was put on the bed the senior anaesthetist, _____, (supporting senior anaesthetist, _____) put a mask on my face and told me "you are having general anaesthetic for this procedure" I did NOT consent to this, everyone in the room was acting as if we were both about to die, my contractions were still so strong that I couldn't stop pushing. _____ was yelling at me to stop pushing as she is once again ramming her hands and a pillow up my vagina trying to push my baby back into me. I was alone amongst these strangers, held down by what no longer even feels like my body, before I am unconscious.

Cassie was gowned and ready to come in when they were refused as I had been given general anaesthetic because I was "hysterical", despite feeling I was the calmest person in that operating room before being put under anaesthetic against my will.

They cut my baby from me and give to Cassie. They say they waited a minute before cutting the cord as we wanted a delayed cord clamping. Lie, a midwife took photos and the cord was clamped and cut as soon as my baby was placed on my leg which was only when _____ allowed her to start taking photos.

My private midwife who was with Cassie left to retrieve my collected colostrum and upon return was not allowed back up for support even though the rule stipulated two support people were allowed. During this time, I haemorrhaged, losing 3 litres of blood. Cassie was left alone with our new baby not knowing what was happening while they gave me two blood transfusions without consent or consultation with my legal spouse. I'm not sure if this is because we're in a queer relationship but they didn't seek consent and I know this is illegal. Cassie was left alone with our baby for 3 ½ hours with our baby, at first when the midwife brought our baby in they were told that I was fine and was getting stitched up, then waited that whole time not being told anything and wondering why we were not together, then another midwife came in and told them that I was not ok and nearly died losing 3 litres of blood and in the ICU. This left my spouse feeling helpless, alone in a birthing unit and not knowing what happened to me and where I was.

I was taken to ICU, my perfectly healthy baby was taken to special care and my spouse, my baby's legal parent, was refused to stay with our baby and sent home.

Again, is this because we are not heterosexual? This instance of a perfectly healthy baby being removed from their parents is outrageous and deeply affected our child who was highly distressed for the start of their life.

Nothing prepares you for being knocked out, pregnant, to waking up not pregnant and with no baby. Being told you can't meet your baby, missing those very important first bonding moments that you will never get back. Hand expressing colostrum to send up to your baby because they won't let you be together, the special care nurses were annoyed that we didn't want any formula given.

and team saw me on rounds that morning and she came happy as if I should be happy with what happens. She said my baby was totally fine and not in stress at all to which I said I knew and all my records showed that there was no fetal distress. None of the notes from my labour at home were looked at or considered and when I confronted about this she said that because my baby's heart rate was only recorded after each contraction, that it wasn't acceptable and it needed to be recorded through each contraction as well. She said I needed the caesarean because my baby's heart rate was slowing during contractions, which she did not expect me to know happens and is normal and safe so long as it returns to normal. She continually disregarded what I said and told me I should be happy because my baby was perfectly healthy.

I asked why she thought I lost so much blood and she said my uterus was too tired to contract. I argued that before being put under my contractions were still frequent and strong and that the reason would be that my body wasn't able to produce the oxytocin needed to contract. She proceeded to disagree. I asked if I was given Pitocin to aid the contractions and she said yes but they couldn't give me enough of anything to contract because my uterus was so stretched and tired. I told her that synthetic versions of the oxytocin are not as effective as oxytocin as they don't break through the blood brain barrier as well. She disagreed and I recommended that she look at Dr peer reviewed study that proves what I said. Despite this she still disregarded what I was saying and saying the information was wrong. There was no point talking to her, she is incapable of accepting any responsibility or hearing her victims. This is consistent with a narcissist.

The amount of lies that came from was horrendous, she was not prepared for me to have any understanding of birth and blatantly lied to me to try and avoid any responsibility. People should be able to trust their care providers and CANNOT be trusted.

When I was moved to the ward and finally reunited with my baby the special care nurse doing the hand over argued with me about my baby receiving colostrum.

I shared my experience with nurses on the ward and they organised the Nurse Unit Manager. She came to see me on the ward after in what felt like an attempt to smooth things over with me. We tried to get clarity around how I ended up being put under general anaesthetic and she gave three different reasons:

- It was a category one caesarean and it is policy that they are all done under general.
- The consultant said it had to be a general
- The anaesthetist was not confident giving me an epidural because I was too fat

When I asked her why my spouse or I were not told about being put under GA she said there were too many people in the room and forgot to tell us. Which contradicts Cassie being taken to be gowned up to be present for the C-Section.

After sharing this with my private midwife who I elected to provide my postpartum care while still in hospital she proceeded to confirm with the manager that it is not policy that all cat 1 caesareans have to be done under GA, and that she also confirmed it is normal and acceptable for the heart rate of the fetus to slow during contractions.

In regards to me being fat, yes I am, I was approximately 105kg at 41 weeks pregnant but my midwife and the others on staff at the hospital said my size would not be a legitimate reason to not provide an epidural.

She then finished our conversation to say “you probably won’t be able to breast feed because of how much blood you lost” to which I replied “well, I am”. A comment put so bluntly could affect someone who was trusted her and jeopardise their ability to peruse EBF.

Every midwife on staff came and asked about what happened and even two midwives who were on staff in the birthing unit the night before to check that I was okay after what happened. Amongst the staff on the ward some comments regarding this included:

- That’s no surprise/That makes sense/“Guess who was on” [from one who knew what happened to another staff member” (most common with 4 staff having this type of response and tells that this is typical misconduct from)
- “I was wondering why there were so many GA’s”
- “She is a bit knife happy”

I also asked where my placenta was and was told that it was sent off for testing. I was very upset that something that I made for my baby was also just sent away like it didn’t belong us without consent of even conversation and would be disposed of like waste. I feel robbed as a person who grew a child that I didn’t

even get to see our placenta. I feel angry that it still would have had my baby's blood in it due to immediately cutting the cord. Taking the placenta home may have helped me mourn what I had lost and at least make me feel like a part of the "birth".

The Patient advocate to see me and they provided me with information on how to make an official complaint which I was adamant I would pursue as soon as I was out of there. Once I was at home though I was not emotionally strong enough to revisit what happened. Upon reflection I was very much in my threat response of fight while in the hospital. Once I was home I started to feel the deeper affects of what happened to me, but was very focussed on trying to help my baby work through the trauma. They were very upset and tense and I know many hospital providers would see this as normal but it is not.

For those in the hospital system who think what happened to me was probably necessary I ask you to read "Fish can't see water: the need to humanize birth" and reflect on how your experience could influence your bias. There was nothing wrong and I was singled off from my supports and dehumanised to an extreme that is unforgivable. I've seen a psychologist, participated women's circles, joined groups, read and listened to countless stories where time and again birthing people have been disrespected, traumatised and brutalised, all to try and help with my recovery.

I was up every night in tears with flash backs of what happened for close to the first year. I had to extend my leave from work because I cannot leave my child Since they were born I have left them alone with my spouse for a maximum of 3 hours a hand full of times. The trauma has given me PPA around being hyper focused on ensuring my child does not continue to suffer from their birth trauma and being separated from their parents for the start of their life. I am still triggered by any casual mention of birth, still have some wakeful nights of tears and hold so much grief around not only not giving birth to my baby, not even being there for the extraction and not being with my child for the start of their life, seeing them with vernix, feeding them for the first time, having skin on skin. My heart is still broken.

Writing this has been so difficult but the opportunity could not be missed. I have hopes of pursuing a further official complaint, in the hopes that is held responsible for her actions and she can't do this to anyone else. However, I am still not emotionally able to even read my notes that I purchased from the hospital a few months after my baby's arrival.