

**Submission
No 1021**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Breana Bromwich

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My daughter was born on the 10th July 2022.

I want to preface this by saying nurses and midwives are the most incredible, down to earth humans and they deserve so much better than what is offered to them.

After 2 days of regular but soft contractions I arrived at the hospital the evening of 8th July for a check up. At this point I was 40+1. When arriving I had the expected monitoring performed as well as a negative RAT test, a stretch and sweep, and a PCR covid test. I was sent home a few hours later and on the drive home my contractions immensely picked up.

I laboured at home for as long as I could and arrived back at the hospital at about 7am on July 9th. When arriving at the door I was told that my PCR test had come back positive and that we needed to go back to the car and wait for an escort. This escort took about 30 minutes (to escort me about 50 metres) all while I was in my car labouring and at the time was in the most pain I had ever felt. Covid restrictions had been fully lifted for months by this point.

When they arrived we were told that my mum and husband who were with me were not allowed to enter the hospital with me as I was Covid positive. This alone was distressing, my husband was eventually allowed to join as long as he agreed not to leave the birthing room.

Once inside I was measuring only 4cm at this point. I asked for pain relief but as I am allergic to morphine, I was unable to have that. As I had covid I was not allowed to use the bath or gas. At this point I wasn't ready to try for an epidural so I was offered Panadol.

I spent about two hours in the shower to try and relieve my pain, this helped. Eventually I moved back to my bed. I would like to note that telling a birthing mother to keep her face mask on while in labour is the biggest load of bs I have ever heard.

By the time I was 8cm dilated I asked for an epidural. My midwife tried to advise otherwise as I was 'so close'. At the time I thought she was just supporting my original request for no epidural but I eventually had to ask 3 times before she agreed to organise it for me. It felt as if I had annoyed her.

This provided unbelievable, immediate relief. I felt like I could see and hear again. I realised I had been in this room for hours and was unable to see anyone's faces, it was all a blur until this point.

This offered a few hours of rest but as warned, it also slowed down my labour immensely. I was not dilating 'in time' and while I was finally somewhat comfortable, and my baby was doing fine we were recommended (more told) that I should have the oxytocin drip. By this point I was vulnerable and exhausted and truly trusted my doctors so agreed.

This didn't progress things as they had hoped so I was having constant cervical examinations. I lost count of how many of these I had. While in labour and in between contractions I couldn't think of a more intrusive thing to do to a woman, it was awful, but apparently necessary.

Eventually my obstetrician came in for a final exam before taking me through for an 'emergency caesarean', I am still unsure as to what the emergency was. Fortunately, and much to everyone's surprise and delight, our daughter was crowning and almost out. With the assistance of an episiotomy I didn't want and a vacuum - 6 minutes and 4 pushes later, our daughter was born. A beautiful baby girl, who filled us with so much immediate love.

During these few minutes of pushing, while my doctor was at the end of my bed his wife facetime'd him as he was supposed to finish work 7 minutes earlier. He proceeded to have a nurse hold his

phone for him and talk to her while I was in the most vulnerable position a woman could ever be in. I laugh about it, but it was incomprehensibly unprofessional.

After this we were 'allowed' to spend a few hours together in our room before my husband was told he would have to leave and I was moved to a quarantined ward. This is where my trauma begins.

I can't remember what time it was but it was late evening at this point and I was moved to another area of the hospital, just my newborn and I. We had a room to ourselves and a very grumpy (assumably overworked) nurse. When I was put in this room, I was told to wait and someone would be with me. I was exhausted by this point, barely able to remember the day. No one came. I sat on the edge of the bed with my newborn for over an hour, unsure whether I was allowed to move or not.

I eventually gave up and tried to get ourselves comfortable. I now know I was in this room for about 18 hours. In that time a nurse came in three times to check on me. This was my first baby, I was all alone without any of my support network and did not know how to change a nappy, how to dress a baby, how to care for myself after giving birth. I certainly didn't know how to breastfeed! As babies do, mine cried and cried and cried that evening and I had no idea how to console her. I felt like a complete failure of a mother.

Whenever the nurse needed to check in she would call my phone to make sure I was fine and also stated that she did not have time to put on the correct PPE to come into my room. My food was placed on the outside of my door, to retrieve myself as if I was in prison.

Eventually the morning rolled around and a new midwife came to check in on me. She was lovely and immediately offered compassion to my situation and the lack of support around me. She sent me home.

I came home and started to settle in the beautiful bubble of parenthood with my husband and also my mum. I was set up with the in home midwife program.

The next day a midwife came and this woman should have retired decades ago, her care was rough, mean, and accusatory. She also told me I wasn't allowed to give my baby a dummy or to put a beanie on her when she's cold. She also asked my husband to not be around when she was examining me. She also said my baby was latching great and was passing all the standard newborn tests.

Over this 2 week program she visited about 4 times. She would often call and ask if I was fine or if she could come another day. It was evident she didn't want to see me and quite frankly, I didn't want to see her.

Day 4 of my baby being earthside, we as sleep deprived as ever and had an inconsolable baby. The midwife weighed her this day and she had lost 12.5% of her body weight. It was then decided that I was not making enough milk for her and she was to be on formula. This was shattering news for me. I had been starving my baby for days, little to my knowledge. It was also the day my mum flew home and the day my hormones plummeted. The feelings of being a failure a few days earlier had felt like a breeze compared to what I was feeling now.

We fed our baby formula and she was a new baby. All was well.

Day 9 when I rolled over to check on my baby in bed, I felt a large gush of blood in my pants. By the time I stood up to check I had bled through an entire fresh maternity pad and blood was trickling down my legs. I took my pants off and blood was just flowing out of me, my bedroom floor looked

like a murder scene. I was haemorrhaging. My husband called the hospital to ask what to do and we were advised to monitor my bleeding. If I was bleeding through more than 1 pad an hour I needed to go in. By this time I was bleeding through a pad every 30 seconds. We called an ambulance.

Paramedics gave me an injection of oxytocin to slow the bleeding. This worked and I felt great. Upon arrival to the hospital I sat in a bed in a hallway for about an hour before I was seen to. I was then taken up to the same room I had been in just a week earlier – when seeing this room I felt an immediate flood of horror. I have never felt anything like it, I was scared to go in there. I was shaking. I now know this was a reaction to my previous time in there.

I was eventually seen to by the same doctor who had delivered our baby. He told me about his week, I told him about mine. I explained the situation and he eventually administered 4 tablets into my vagina in the hopes of restarting contractions for fear I may have some placenta left inside of me.

I waited the 4 hours that I was told this would take to work, 3 of the 4 tablets fell out of me. I advised the nurse and they said that was fine. During a handover I specifically remember being referred to as “a young mum with her first big bleed”. As someone who has had heavy periods her entire life, I know what a heavy bleed is and this was not that. It was at this moment I felt I wasn’t being taken seriously. Eventually the doctor checked up on me, I explained I had felt nothing and he said that was great and sent me home again. Warned that I might bleed again but it won’t be anything to worry about.

Day 12 I was out for dinner with my new little family, still in our little bubble. We got home and sat down to watch a movie. I felt that gush of blood again. This time it was so much worse. I had to stand over my toilet. It was like a tap had been turned on inside of me, the blood wasn’t slowing, my house looked like a murder scene again. We called the ambulance again.

This time I was taken through immediately to resus where I spent the majority of my time. I bled through every trauma pad they had. There was so much blood my nurse requested not to be present. My doctor was pulling clots out of me the size of tennis balls. It was one of the most confronting events I have ever experienced. It was also my birthday.

The doctor I had in emergency was an absolute angel, I hold so much respect for her. The obs team again tried to brush me off and my doctor kept standing her ground and saying that I needed surgery. I remember them saying “but she’s not bleeding anymore”, this was after I had bled and bled and bled so much that I lost consciousness and required several blood transfusions. This is genuinely the most traumatic thing I have ever been through. I thought I was going to die. I thought I was about to leave my husband and our newborn baby forever. I was absolutely terrified. I felt that, again, I wasn’t being taken seriously.

I was eventually given an ultrasound which found I did have retained products and then was scheduled for a standard D&C. I was fine after this. I was not offered any follow up care either.

It shouldn’t have gone that far. It shouldn’t have been as bad as it was. I truly believe that if I was given the proper care when I gave birth to my daughter I would have been fine. The way I was isolated after her birth was traumatic. The continuity of care was pathetic, the way I was pushed aside was pathetic and the way I wasn’t taken seriously when I said I wasn’t okay was gross and scary. I wasn’t looking for attention, I wasn’t overreacting, I wasn’t wrong. I was a woman who had just given birth and was suffering complications.

I really hate the word trauma, but that truly is the only word to explain my birthing experience.

12 months later and we found out I was very unexpectedly pregnant again. This brought up the conversation of everything which happened when our daughter was born and made us face head on the trauma we went through. It also made us realise that neither of us had dealt with it. We had just been trying to survive the past 12 months with a baby. Neither of us were ready for another baby, mainly because we were terrified of a repeat of the year before.

We opted for a medical termination.

I had this at the start of July 2023. Again, we thought everything went well. I went to all my appointments; my doctor was aware of our situation and everything which had happened and was very supportive. I had my final check up 2 weeks later with no issues.

Not long after this, much to our absolute horror, I haemorrhaged again. This time at work.

I went immediately to the hospital, we had moved house by now so I went to a new hospital. I spent 6 hours in emergency waiting to be seen. When I was eventually seen I explained everything to my doctor. Except for the sudden bleed, I was asymptomatic, the same as last time. He assured me I was fine. I pressed for more tests and more information. He said there wasn't much else he could do other than ask me to come back in the morning for an ultrasound. I then asked if he thought I might have retained products from my termination. He looked at me strangely and said that I should be fine as that was 12 months ago. 12 months ago? I had a termination about 2 weeks ago. I told him this several times, he wasn't listening.

I came back the next day at 7am for my ultrasound, referral in hand. I waited until 8:30am when I was told that they wouldn't have time to see me as they had "actual pregnant women to care for". I was gobsmacked. Flooded with emotions from the year before, again feeling unheard and like 'a young, first time mum' I burst into tears. I begged her not to send me home again. She got approval from a doctor that I could get the ultrasound.

The ultrasound confirmed I, again, had retained products of conception and I again was scheduled for a D&C. Exactly 12 months later, again on my birthday.

Moreover, I have been left with the horrible guilt of opting for a termination so that we could heal and not have a repeat of what had happened previously, only for it to happen again.

If I did not have the experience from the year earlier, I would have just gone home as I was told with the potential to again haemorrhage massively and potentially bleed out again.

I am so angry that I had to stand up for myself.

I'm so angry I wasn't taken seriously.

I'm so angry at what could have happened.

I'm angry I almost died in front of my husband and newborn.

I'm angry I wasn't supported.

I am angry.

I am sad.

I am exhausted.

I am one story of thousands. Please support women better. Trust midwives. Aim to lower the amount of intervention in the birthing room. Keep doctors away unless necessary. Continuity of care is crucial. Listen to what we are asking for. Listen to the birthing person. Pay nurses better.

Our experience has left us not wanting to have any more children.