

Submission
No 1027

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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My name is . I birthed my firstborn in 2014. Such was the trauma from my birth that when I returned home I did not set foot outside the front door for 7 days. I did not leave my house for 3 weeks. I felt anxiety, sleep deprivation and fear of everything. I didn't want to shower or bath my baby boy. During this time I didn't know what was normal and what wasn't.

I birthed through the private system at Private Hospital under Obstetrician . I had no education about the different models of care and assumed it would all be fine. I had no birth plan, no idea about any of it. I had a low-risk problem free pregnancy and was told by the obstetrician "you'll do well in birth".

When my waters broke at home 10 days before my due date I went to the hospital as instructed. There were no other labour signs at all. A few hours later I was hooked up to a drip to get labour going (approx. 9am). I did not move off the bed the entire time as I was told I needed monitoring and couldn't come off the machines. Labour started and by noon the contractions were unbearable. At this point I felt like a passenger who just needed to follow the nurse's instructions. I had zero choices offered to me and remained on the bed.

I can't remember when I started pushing but just pushed when I was told to. I pushed until I vomited. Obstetrician was called in at some point early evening and I felt bad because he was called in on a Sunday night. The stream of interventions came as follows:

Episiotomy

Vacuum

Forceps- I remember the Obstetrician pulling at the baby so hard he was shaking

Baby's head could be seen

Then Ob said to the nurse "Code 3 C-section"

I had no idea what was going on or what that code meant. I was scared but was assured the whole time that they were doing what they needed to do to ensure the health of my baby. This made me feel powerless.

My baby was born around 8pm and was immediately taken away. I was taken to recovery. I got to see my baby briefly for the first time around 10pm, no hold just touched his hand. I then spent the night in my room alone. I had my first hold of him the following day. Ob came past the next morning patted my knee and said "sorry about that" (the birth). My baby was in special care for the first 2 nights due to head trauma and a poor start to life. I didn't realise something was very wrong with me because I had no frame of reference, but I struggled from then. I couldn't think properly and couldn't reconcile any of it. Went home day 7, as baby had jaundice.

The consequences of this experience for me were:

Post natal depression and anxiety. Difficulty bonding with my baby and lived in a state of fear of everything, his cries, taking him outside, etc. Relationship stress and subsequent separation. Isolation, guilt and shame. Feeling like I failed, like I did something wrong. Being avoidant of ever wanting to have another child again. I still cannot look at photos of the first few weeks of my son's life, and struggle to talk about my experience.

At no point did my care provider discuss details to help me make informed choices about birth that I might consider before going into labour to help me prepare.

During the birth of my son I did not feel like I had a choice about the interventions, they were not communicated as an option but I was told what was happening next. They were done to me. This includes the episiotomy, vacuum, forceps and c-section. I was not made aware of the risks and benefits or the alternative options I could consider. The decision making felt out of my control.

I didn't make a complaint because for a long time I was unable to speak about my experience. I also felt like I had somehow failed by being unprepared and that it was my fault.

I don't feel like there are any protections for women in terms of law, policies and legislation.

I would like to see at least one mandatory education session for expectant mothers to be provided with a full picture of their birth options, the statistics and data behind each of the models of care, birth options and longer term outcomes. We assume fairness across the sector and this is not the case. I believe the programs such as MGP should be made available to every woman as a matter of course.

7 years later and with my new partner, we talked about my first birth. He supported me in my decision to try again. We fell pregnant, and I took the following steps:

- Spoke to women I knew who had a good birth experience
- Listened to birthing podcasts including Australian Birth Stories
- Read Rhea Dempsey's book 'Birth With Confidence'
- Spoke to senior midwife who debriefed my first birth with me and started to shift my mindset about my first birth being my failure
- Contacted Private Hospital and Dr and paid to have my hospital and pregnancy records released so I could review the facts around my birth and try to figure out exactly what happened
- Attended the Calm Birth course
- Chose a different model of care and was lucky enough to be accepted onto the MGP program.

All of this additional work was undertaken by myself, at my own cost due to my first experience, and determination that it wouldn't happen again.