

Submission
No 1030

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

In September, 2022, I gave birth at _____ Hospital.

What was intended to be an exciting, happy chapter in my life, meeting our baby left me with trauma and anxiety.

Throughout my pregnancy, I felt concerns of mine were being dismissed by the doctors at the antenatal clinic. Concerns over my blood pressure and proteinuria were ignored until my regular general practitioner stepped in. After my concerns were heard and recognised, I was diagnosed with Preeclampsia.

Pre-Eclampsia in itself can be terrifying, especially as a first time mother. This anxiety was made worse by miscommunication from doctors, mixed opinions and care plans throughout my care team and a lack of direction for my birth. I now know, NSW Health Guidelines recommend an induction at 37 weeks for Pre-Eclamptic patients. During my pregnancy this was never conveyed to me by the people who I trusted with my care. Throughout my pregnancy, I saw three different doctors at the prenatal clinic, all of whom gave me different plans of action for my birth. I was told I should be induced at 37 weeks, 38 weeks, and to push it as long as possible.

At a time I should've felt cared for, I was anxious and felt dismissed by my care team. I felt I had no clear action plan for my birth and was left feeling confused about what option was safest for my baby.

At my second last appointment in the antenatal access unit, a doctor continued telling me we should push induction until 38-39 weeks. I was 36 weeks at this time and my blood pressure remained unstable, even on medication (which had been increased 3 times). The following day, at another appointment, my blood pressure sky-rocketed and required a rapid response team.

This experience led to a traumatic 3 day labour, multiple failed attempts at induction and finally, an emergency caesarean. Throughout it all, I felt unprepared and confused and most of all let down by the doctor's overseeing my pregnancy. I was not prepared and felt they dismissed the seriousness of Preeclampsia. This birth left me with post-partum flashbacks, anxiety and guilt that I had almost lost my baby. My birth led me to seek therapy to understand why the doctor's hadn't understood the seriousness.

If I could make any recommendations following my birth, they would be the following:

- The recommended plan of treatment for PreEclampsia in Australia is an induction at 37 weeks. This should have been communicated to me and been the consistent plan among my care team. There shouldn't have been a back and forth about prolonging my induction, as I now know the risk with PreEclampsia grows increasingly every day after this point.
- During my labour, a nurse assured me I did not in fact have PreEclampsia due to a lack of abnormal liver enzymes in my blood work. The NSW health guidelines clearly state that PreEclampsia is diagnosed with high blood pressure AND the presence of

one other symptom. I had protein in my urine, a level high enough to warrant my earlier diagnosis.

- I cannot express my gratitude to the nurses who cared for me during my rapid response and birth in words. However, prior to my rapid response and elevated blood pressure, I had been waiting almost 2 hours since my allocated appointment time. Had I waited longer and my blood pressure remained unchecked, the result could have been catastrophic. The wait was due to a huge demand on nurses in the antenatal access unit, limited staff available and a limit of bed available. These nurses were working under enormous pressure without support. Staffing ratios need to be addressed and nurses deserve substantial pay for their hard work. They saved my life and my baby's life.
- 5 days after giving birth, we were discharged and told it was safe to go home even though our baby had not even spent a night in our room and had just finished treatment in the NICU for his jaundice. His blood work indicated the Jaundice was still present but we were assured it was safe. It was not. Our first night home, my baby would not eat and was lethargic, did not cry and was extremely cold. We presented back at the maternity ward and his Jaundice was at an alarming level.

My hope with this submission is better education and a better understanding about PreEclampsia and the best course of action after diagnosis. The inconsistency in my care caused further anxiety for me. Nurses and doctors should be well informed about this condition, the risks and the recommendations written by NSW Health to ensure safe births for mothers and their babies.

I hope in the future, no other mother has to experience what I went through.