

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My story with birth trauma

Hi,

I am writing this in the hope that I can help to fix some of the problems in the birthing system.

I was meant to birth my first baby at [redacted] hospital in Sydney but when a scan at 29 weeks revealed that my baby had fallen behind in growth I was transferred over to care at the foetal maternal unit.

At my first appointment at [redacted] all my dreams of having a natural, drug free birth came crashing down when I was told I was most likely developing preeclampsia and that I would be having my baby via caesarean most likely in the next couple of weeks. They told me at 29 weeks that they don't see cases like mine going past 32 weeks and it will need to be a caesarean as the baby will be too small to handle a natural birth.

I was absolutely heartbroken, I had considered the thought of pain relief if I was desperate but in my mind I knew I was strong and wouldn't need it and was so confident in my ability to birth my baby naturally with no intervention. I was actually really scared of the epidural as I had known someone who had lost feeling in their legs for a long time from it. The epidural was my biggest fear in childbirth. So, when I learnt that I was going to have to have it because I had to have a Caesar I was really scared. I didn't like that the doctors there told me I wouldn't make it past 32 weeks and that I HAD to have a caeser. I knew there was an issue with my pregnancy but it felt horrible and belittling to be told what was going to be happening to my baby and my body and to be given basically no hope of making it past 32 weeks, even though I did!

I ended up making it to 36 weeks but for those 7 highly stressful weeks I had to go to the hospital to get multiple scans per week with my hospital bag packed never knowing if today would be the day.

It was the most stressful time of my life as well as the few weeks to follow.

For every week that passed, I would ask if I could have a natural birth and they treated me like a fool for even asking. I still wonder to this day if I had of gotten a second opinion if the caeser was really needed or if I could have just been induced.

Besides that I feel like the care in that unit was good, I stayed in hospital for 5 days prior to having my baby as my blood pressure had gone up so they put me on some medication and kept me in until the day we decided on. I felt like the midwives and nurses who were there in those 5 days were really helpful and attentive and caring. It wasn't until I had my baby that things took a major turn for the worst.

Because I was in the hospital for 5 days before I had my baby I had been asking and was told I would be able to meet with the surgeon who was to deliver my baby to talk about my birth plan and to ease my nerves and my fears about it being a stressful entry to the world for my daughter. I was so disappointed when this didn't end up happening until 2 minutes before I walked in to get to epidural. It felt really stressful and I wasn't given the time to ask the questions I had. Then I was taken into the theatre on my own to face my biggest fear of the whole thing – the spinal epidural – ON MY OWN. I do not see why husbands can not come in to be there for the women for this. I was sitting on the bed waiting for the spinal and heard the anaesthetist approach from behind me to and start to talk someone through the process as it was being done to me. So a trainee actually did my spinal and I wasn't even asked her spoken to about this happening – it just got done to me. I was too vulnerable

and scared and unsure of my rights to speak up and say I wasn't comfortable with this so I just let it happen. It was so scary.

Then when my baby was born she was taken away within the room to be checked and I wasn't allowed to have her on my chest straight away. It was really stressful for me for her to be within the room but over the other corner where I couldn't see what was happening. I didn't understand why they couldn't have orientated the room so that mothers could see their babies when they needed to be taken away like this.

Just after I was finished being stitched up they were going to make me wait until we were both wheeled to the nicu to have a cuddle but then my baby started not breathing very well. Luckily my husband really stepped up at this point and asserted that I needed to hold her as I think we were told this could happen before we left the theatre. As soon as she was placed on my chest her breathing regulated and she was ok. She was obviously just highly stressed to.

We then went to nicu and I got to cuddle her for as long as I wanted luckily.

When it had been about two hours I felt it was time for me to go and check into my room to have some food and to have my obs checked.... I presumed whenever I wanted I could be wheeled back to see her.

Once I finished my obs and food I was eager to go back and see my daughter so I asked the midwife if I could be taken back up to the nicu. This was when she informed me that she couldn't take me back up on my bed and that if I wanted to go up I had to get into the wheelchair or walk up. This seemed absurd to me that 2.5 hrs after major abdominal surgery that they would suggest that I get up and walk but I was desperate to be with my daughter again so I tried. I tried so hard but I just couldn't get into that wheelchair. I can't even begin to describe how traumatic this was for me to be separated from my baby like this. It is absolutely disgusting. I laid in that room broken into a million pieces the rest of the afternoon knowing I couldn't get to my baby and she was up in the nicu without me. I knew she would be feeling stressed as she was when she wasn't with me in the theatre. My husband stayed by her side but this is not good enough. Babies need their mothers. This initial separation and stressful/traumatic birth and hospital experience is what led to a severe struggle with my milk supply and breastfeeding for the rest of our journey. I know this because my second baby was born in a beautiful natural birth and never got separated from me and was solely breastfed until she was 2 with no problems with supply.

By the time it got to the early evening I worked up the strength to get myself into the wheelchair but it was the most painful thing I've ever done.

For the remaining of the 5 days that I was there this was a huge struggle for me. I was dealing with excruciating pain that didn't seem to be normal but every time I called a midwife in to ask about it I was brushed off and made to feel like a wimp for not being able to handle this surgery. I had black bruising from my wound all the way to my bottom and the area was wobbly and full of fluid... I knew this couldn't be normal but every time I asked a midwife they would call a doctor in who would also brush it off and say it was fine. I never got any answers as to why my recovery was so bad but for around 8 weeks I could not stand up straight, I had so much pain it was unbearable, I had excruciating pain to the point where I would cry every time I had to wee and poo. To make things worse apparently the normal tape they use for the wound in the theatre had run out so they had given me this horrible sticky tape that would stick the wound to my clothes so every time I had to go to the toilet I had to peel the clothing off the wound... I just can't tell you how much pain I was in and what upset me was that I was treated like a winger.

I would ring the bell in the middle of the night to try to get someone to deliver my milk to the nicu as I was struggling so much to get myself into the wheelchair on my own and get myself up there in time and so badly just needed to be still and recover, but no one would come and then I would miss her feeds and also lose out on sleep waiting for them to come.

I just remember feeling like I was asking so much of them to deliver the milk but I just needed the help so badly and felt it wasn't a big ask... I needed support and there was none. I was a mother separated from her premature baby having a severely bad recovery and not getting any answers as to why, I remember feeling so scared that they had done something wrong in my operation and that I may not ever fully recover. This was allot to deal with on top of the normal stress of having a premature baby in nicu.

It didn't feel right that I would see other women up and walking around with seemingly not much pain just a few days after their surgery yet here I was feeling unable to even get into a wheelchair. I knew I had a good pain threshold and that I was not having a normal recovery, but I just kept getting told it seemed normal.

After 5 days of being at _____ my daughter was transferred to the nicu in manly so we could be closer to home as I was being discharged. She was in hospital for another 3 weeks here for which we continued to be separated every night. I will never forget the pain of this. Being separated from your baby is not right, something needs to be done to stop this. I believe my daughter has been really affected by the trauma of this to, she doesn't trust people easy, she is so fearful and cautious and shy. I have no doubt that this is because her birth was highly stressful and we were separated so much. This breaks my heart.

I then went on to think I could birth my second baby at manly given there were no complications the second time around. Boy was it a battle. I wasn't allowed to have continuity of care because I was high risk which is just so insane because high risk people even more so need continuity of care!

I had to explain my long complex story to so many different staff all of which just wanted me to have a repeat ceaser even knowing the trauma it had caused me.

At 30 weeks when my baby was breech they told me to book in the repeat ceaser. I asked if I could have a doctor try to turn her and they said it was too risky and to book in the repeat ceaser because my due date was near new years eve. I was furious.

This is when I called the most incredible man _____ at _____ hospital and he took me under his wing and turned my baby no problems and allowed me to birth at his hospital which was out of my zoning. He put me in the group midwifery program last minute so that I had continuity of care. He even told me that if my baby didn't turn I could try for a breech natural birth if that's what I wanted. I wanted to cry because it was the first time in the whole process that I felt in control and like I mattered.

I went on to have an amazingly healing natural birth with no intervention and drugs and am so grateful that I did my research and I knew to call this man. He is doing amazing work and his model of care should be copied at all hospitals.

Please hear this story and do what you can to make things better for mothers and babies. Birth matters, it affects babies more than anyone can understand unless you have had a traumatic

experience yourself. I am forever changed from my birthing experience with my first daughter and we will both be trying to heal from this for the rest of our lives.