

**Submission
No 932**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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To whom it may concern,

At age 29 I did IVF on my own with a sperm donor and became pregnant right away. My pregnancy was 'textbook' as they say, and I was with the midwife group practice at a public hospital-

During the early stages I saw a midwife who casually told me it was the hospital's policy to recommend induction for IVF pregnancies which threw me off, and when I asked for more info as I couldn't understand why, I was dismissed and told we could talk about it closer to my birth. This in itself was frustrating and confusing; I'd been planning for a natural birth and would have preferred to avoid induction because the baby needs more monitoring, contractions can seem more intense, and you get to move around less.

Eventually I was seen by a doctor and other midwives (the original midwife left although I am unsure why) and they explained that studies show a 1% higher chance of infant death/stillbirth beyond 40 weeks for an IVF pregnancy. I asked whether the studies are for 30 year old women with no fertility issues and they weren't really able to say. It seemed to me like this may have made sense for an older woman who had fertility issues because their explanation was around the placenta not functioning as well after 40 weeks.

Regardless, when at 38+1 I had decreased foetal movements and ended up at the hospital for monitoring, it seemed like having an induction was my only choice. I felt fearful that something would be wrong with the baby despite monitoring indicating she was fine. Doctors and midwives explained that they could never be sure of the baby's status and given I felt decreased movements I would have to make a choice about whether to go home or have an induction. Despite me wanting autonomy over my birth choices, it felt strange how little they gave their professional, medical opinion and how risk averse they were being. I assumed they'd force me to get induced at full term regardless and first pregnancies often go over term, so I agreed to an induction.

I was induced with gel, I found vaginal examinations very uncomfortable, something which seemed to frustrate my midwife and I heard her expressing this to another midwife at handover. The gas made me feel quite out of it and unwell, so I rarely used it. In the morning when things began to ramp up, I experienced hard and fast contractions with what felt like no break, and I was screaming for help because of the pain. My birth partner seemed stressed and worried and didn't offer much support. My midwife and the other midwives milling about at times seemed very unsympathetic and busy. I sort of felt like they had lots to do, and nobody paid me much attention. They looked at the monitors and ensured the baby's heart rate was monitored etc, but I felt completely out of control and ignored.

Eventually I demanded a c section because the pain was so immense, I assumed something was wrong. I think the overwhelming feeling that I have when looking back is that nobody really told me to get a hold of myself, explained what was happening, that the pain was normal and that both of us were fine at that stage. It felt like everything was happening around me without my involvement or understanding. Eventually they agreed to let me get in the shower but then quickly made me get out because they couldn't properly monitor the baby. It was something that really helped with the pain when nothing else had. I demanded an epidural and felt immediate relief, I was about 7 cms dilated at that stage.

About an hour or two later, they were trying to get a clip on the baby's head, the cord suddenly prolapsed and a red button was pushed with lots of people rushing into the room. I was told they needed to do an emergency c section and that this does not happen very often. A midwife had to kneel on my bed while I laid on my side with my legs open and she held the baby inside whilst we

rushed to theatre for an emergency c section. I asked whether the baby was ok and was told they were 'doing everything they could' which did not seem positive at all. They told me they could not use the epidural due to the emergency nature, so I was put to sleep quite quickly and the c section went normally. I was told I lost a normal amount of blood. This, whilst it sounds traumatic was not necessarily the bulk of my trauma from the birth but what was happening prior to this and what occurred post birth when I was in the hospital with baby.

The baby was healthy but due to the trauma and blood loss (so I was told), my breast milk dried up and it was a struggle to feed as I needed nipple shields. I was pumping very often and feeding her pre-birth expressed colostrum and occasional formula as per medical advice. We later went on to exclusively breast feed and did not stop breast feeding until age 15 months. I was confused much of this time although I know many new mothers are. Part of this was due to it being during the pandemic and not being able to have anyone visit me in the hospital or after when I went home. I felt unsupported and the midwives were often dismissive and seemed like they didn't have time for me. There were two or three who were very supportive and caring and I always looked forward to having on shift though.

I was in hospital for 5 days; I developed a post epidural headache which I was told might happen due to the epidural working so fast and concerns about leaking spinal fluid, this was a real struggle. My baby did not like being laid down which later resulted in being diagnosed with reflux and put on medication at about 3 months of age. This was also a massive struggle and I felt unheard about my concerns. On day 5 I was keen to leave, it was 21 December and I drove a manual car; I had very few people available (and that I felt safe transporting my newborn during peak pandemic) that could pick us up given I was told not to drive post c section. A paediatrician, obstetrician and lactation consultant had seen us multiple times without issue, and I felt strongly that going home to our own environment with more people able to visit and help was the best thing for us both.

The final step in our discharge process was to weigh my newborn who had lost 13% birth weight and the nurses expressed concern. They made me wait for my midwife to come and watch me feed my child to ensure I knew how; she expressed no concerns. They later told me I would need to wait to be seen by the paediatrician, obstetrician, and lactation consultant *again* because they needed to sign off given the weight loss. I asked why given they had seen us already a few times during our stay and asked what would differ in my feeding plan the lactation consultant and I had discussed. I stated that I had formula at home I could give the baby if needed and intended to discharge at the time originally agreed to when my family member was coming to drive us home. A nurse came into the room and told me 'given your circumstances and lack of support at home' she would report me to FACS if I discharged my newborn and I against medical advice. I feel strongly that this decision was made due to me being a single, gay woman without a second parent for my child. I work in a respected position; I had family and friends to support me at home and have previously worked in childcare. I have no doubt that if I had a male partner, they would not have threatened this which I feel is discriminatory. I felt forced to stay, this discussion and the threat made me very distressed.

When I eventually got to leave, I was told to come to the hospital every 2 days to see a lactation consultant at the peak of summer, during a pandemic without the capacity to drive, with a car which limited people could drive and with no intention of going on public transport with my new baby. I drove myself and my baby to hospital every time with the threat of a report to family services hanging over my head and lied and said I'd been given a lift in when I was asked. I spent perhaps a month logging my child's every feed and nappy movements on a piece of paper with close

monitoring from the midwife and lactation consultant. I was triple feeding; pumping breast milk, feeding at the breast and doing breast milk top up bottle feeds 3 hourly.

Due to the baby's reflux, my isolation and fear of being reports to family services, I never disclosed the serious postpartum depression and anxiety I developed to any medical professional who followed up post discharge. I was admitted to _____ at 2.5 months and soon after my child was prescribed medication which assisted with the reflux so that I could lie her down and get some sleep. I got barely any sleep during the first 2-3 months, I had very little support and felt unable to reach out to professionals. I told a family and community health centre nurse during a check up that I had slightly elevated my child's bassinet on one side to assist with her reflux (the bassinet was located in my room beside my bed at all times) and she scorned me telling me this was contra indicated for SIDS. I never returned to any family and community health centre again. I spoke with many others who were new parents at that time who agreed that the family and community health centre nurses can be 'old school' and often upset people. I began doing check ups at my GP instead.