

Submission
No 937

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Earlier this year I gave birth to my first baby at the _____ Hospital. What should have been a wonderful and positive experience left me feeling disempowered and helpless from my antenatal care until our final day in hospital one week later. I do not have a story involving huge blood loss, violent interventions, or injury to me or my baby. However, I do believe that experiences such as mine are commonplace outside of continuity programs and that this experience as a whole left me emotionally traumatised to the point I have been unable to write it in words in any productive manner until this point.

My pregnancy was a happy, healthy, and low risk with little interaction with the health system for the most part. At my 32 week appointment I raised some concerns I had about the way I was feeling and some things that I had noticed. These concerns were dismissed by this midwife who I had never met before, and I was told that if I was worried that I could monitor myself at work (I am an enrolled nurse). I brought these concerns up again at 34 weeks and was again dismissed. I left feeling embarrassed and like I was being an overreacting idiot. The next week I took myself to the women's care unit at the hospital in which I work (not my birthing hospital) after experiencing a visual disturbance on shift and was told preeclampsia was inevitable. I would like to take a moment to pause here and mention that the care I received in this moment at _____ Hospital was fantastic.

I re-presented to _____ for ongoing monitoring as it was my birthing hospital, and while there rode a rollercoaster of differing opinions. Despite periods of second daily monitoring, I do not believe we saw the same doctor twice. Every doctor we saw had a completely different opinion as to what our management looked like, and it felt that nobody was communicating regarding my care. Eventually it was decided that I would be induced at 39 weeks as this was best for my baby and it was clear that my body was struggling. Two days later during routine monitoring I was told both that I was fine and did not have preeclampsia and was given the firm recommendation to have my baby over the weekend in the same day. I understand that preeclampsia is an unpredictable disease and that my blood results were suggesting the HELLP syndrome was developing, I understand that both of these things could have serious consequence for both me and my baby, however in that moment, neither of us were dying.

I was overwhelmed by this recommendation given that only two days earlier a doctor had told me that having my baby earlier than 39 weeks would have negative implications for her development long term. When I asked what the alternatives were I was told my only option was to come back every single day for monitoring and if I chose to do that, I would deteriorate quickly, and my only option would be c-section under general anaesthetic. In other words, if I wanted a vaginal birth, now or never. In hindsight, the consultant who had made this life altering recommendation never even came to speak with us himself and relayed all this information to us through a lovely, but junior doctor. I asked for time to consider and although granted, we felt pressured to make the decision on the spot as the day was getting on. I left there feeling disempowered and as though I had no choice. I had a stretch and sweep performed on my very unfavourable cervix that day and re-presented the next day to begin the process. At this point, I am not even sure if I signed a consent form.

When it came time to break my waters the midwife who came to get me asked if I was ready to go have a baby and I just cried, because I wasn't. At this point I realised nobody had even explained to me what the rest of the induction process involved. 15 hours of horrendous labour later, my daughter was dragged into the world via emergency c-section after becoming stuck in posterior position. Again, I would like to pause here to state that the midwifery care I received through labour was phenomenal even though the outcome was not what I wanted. Thank you _____ and _____.

We arrived back on the ward and my partner ended up sleeping on the floor because even though the bed next to me was empty, he wasn't technically allowed to stay. After that it felt like people just came and said "stuff" to us and left, never to be seen again. People came and dropped off important documents and just left them lying around, made appointments for me and didn't write them down or check that I understood, APS came to make sure I wasn't bleeding in my spine after multiple failed attempts to deliver spinal anaesthetic and my low platelet count, and every time I buzzed for help, someone appear to shove my babies face on to by bleeding nipple and leave again immediately. The only offer of education we were given was when I was 6hrs post op and couldn't walk yet (it was in a common area) and again, all of the concerns I raised about my milk, feeding, and my daughters sleepiness were dismissed as normal things that will resolve on their own. We were discharged by obstetrics, the midwives and paediatrics with nil concern on day 2 post op and were back less than incredibly jaundiced baby as I was not producing milk of any kind.

When my daughter was admitted to special care nursery, she was nursed in a single room in WCU because she had been out in the community and therefore not allowed in the nursery. Despite being in a single room this time, I was informed my daughter was not sick enough for my partner to be allowed to stay. Throughout this admission the special care staff repeated to me and my partner that this had happened because I had left too early. I struggled immensely getting up and down on my own to keep on top of our 3hrly feeding and pumping regime being only 3 days post op from major abdominal surgery myself and on the first night began bleeding from my surgical wound. I bled through multiple pressure dressings and for 36hours before being readmitted despite multiple midwifery staff and doctors knowing. No further investigation was done to determine the source of the bleeding and I was instead given 24hrs of IV antibiotics I now do not believe to have been clinically indicated.

At medical debrief I was informed that on paper our case was straightforward and a great outcome. However, I left this experience feeling as though I was pressure into a birth my baby and my body were not ready for that went inevitably wrong in every way, that I was not heard at any point in the process and my feelings didn't matter, and that I was the reason my baby got sick. This contributed to a great deal of pain and stress for both my partner and I and inevitably set me up for postnatal depression and anxiety that I feel I am only starting to recover from 6 months later. I still feel traumatised by this experience and extremely disheartened that this was considered a good outcome.