

Submission
No 1379

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Birth Trauma Submission

2014

My first birth was very traumatic, and I thought both my baby and I were going to die. It's been nearly 10yrs and I still cannot talk about it without crying or getting upset. I have since been diagnosed with PTSD.

I was induced because I had gestational diabetes and at 38 weeks, I was told that I had to be induced. If I knew what I know now, I would never have agreed to the intervention. The pain was swift, aggressive, and brutal. There was no build up and for 26hrs I was in labour, however I did not progress beyond 4cms dilation. When they broke my waters manually at 0830, the baby was distressed and there was meconium in the waters and his heartrate was erratic. We thought at that point that we may have to go for an emergency c-section; however, they hooked me up for monitoring and his heart rate calmed down enough for me to wait and see throughout the day.

Hours passed and no progression. Gas did not help the pain. I had an epidural at 1pm and eventually later in the afternoon a Syntocinon drip to attempt to move things along. There was still no meaningful progression, so we made the decision to do a c-section at 5pm. Unfortunately, the epidural was not strong enough for me to stay awake during my c-section and I was given 2min notice before they gave me a general anaesthetic to birth my baby. I was utterly heartbroken for not being conscious when he was born. I didn't hear him cry his first cry. I wasn't conscious for his first breath. I kept expecting that he wouldn't be alive because of the rush of things. I started to panic before they put me under, not sure if I'd survive/wake up or not. I was told he was born around 5:45pm.

I woke up in recovery in a panick, asking after my baby. The nurses told me the baby was ok. The baby was in NICU with breathing difficulties because of the meconium and they were monitoring him there. I was returned to the ward with the empty bassinette, and I'll never forget that for as long as I'll live – it felt surreal. I felt useless. I saw our baby 5hrs after he was born for a minute and then not again until 2:30pm the next day, almost 24hrs after he was born. I finally got to hold him then. I don't remember very much from those first few hours the night he was born other than a midwife milking me and I was crying for my baby.

The next day, when our baby was able to be moved into the room with me, I was terrified I wouldn't be allowed to keep him. My c-section wound got horribly infected with pus because nurses were not checking on me and I ended up needing to stay 10days in hospital.

The wound took a month to fully close. I was diagnosed with post-natal depression at 5mths post-partum.

2016

I was diagnosed with prenatal depression in my second pregnancy when I was 6mths pregnant with my daughter. I wanted to self-harm and end my/our life whilst my son was young and wouldn't remember me. I was grieving another death in the family and was under an enormous amount of stress and was terrified of going through another horrific birth as I had the first time. I told my obgyn of my fears and we planned and scheduled a c-section for the second birth. I wasn't entirely upfront with just how dark my thoughts were, but I was under the daily care of the local mental health care

team of the local hospital after presenting there in crisis, so they knew that I needed help, or I was to be scheduled for my own safety next time I presented.

My daughter was born calmly, 6wks later in a planned c-section with me conscious (the spinal block was sufficient, and I didn't require a general anaesthetic this time).

Predictably, I was diagnosed with severe post-natal depression at 4wks post-partum. On reflection I probably should have been hospitalised as an inpatient, but I managed to keep myself and my baby safe.

My physical recovery from the c-section was much better the second time, however breastfeeding was much harder which I didn't expect.

The mental health toll from both births, especially the first very traumatic birth has been significant. If I had an 'easier' birth or had more help in my recovery, I think I would have gone into my second pregnancy with more of a positive attitude.

Birth trauma has had a significant impact on my mental health, long term and I've since been diagnosed with PTSD.