

Submission
No 1415

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

In July 2018 I gave birth at Hospital, NSW.

What was meant to be a happy and exciting event welcoming our first baby ended in quite a traumatic experience and not at all how my husband or I wanted and hoped for it to be.

In the lead up to birth, during birth and after birth, I was subject to instances of coercion, disrespectful care, being dismissed and bullying.

I was coerced into an induction (that ended with a cascade of interventions I didn't want and did not consent to) by being given inaccurate and misleading information. I learnt after the fact that my Dr was going on holidays and that is why he ultimately convinced me to be induced. Confirmed this by talking with midwife's I knew at the hospital.

I was not offered anything to eat for 38hrs and no drink for 23hrs and only got some juice after I said I needed something to give me energy to birth my baby as when it was time to 'push' I was so exhausted I was falling asleep.

I was coerced and bullied into the one birthing position I clearly stated I did not want to be in that was clearly written in my birth plan/preferences that the medical team had a copy of. My preference was dismissed. Instead numerous staff members were holding my legs, arms etc in positions while I pushed. Positions they deemed were best. They instructed me when to push and I was made to push even when I didn't have a sensation to. I was directed when to breath and when not to and when to push and when not to. All of this lead to quite extensive physical damage and trauma.

I ended up with a complicated tear to suture and the Dr thought I may have also torn my urethra and ability to empty my bladder. So he inserted a catheter. I also developed a large haematoma. The largest the medical team had ever seen. Not a record I wanted. All this physical trauma made being a new mum so much more challenging. Sitting and laying were almost unbearable. The added accessory to carry around of the urine bag while also holding my baby was an added hurdle. Even just trying to find a position to hold and feed my baby was tricky. Standing up seemed to be the best but after a nurse berated me for not sitting to feed I thought this was no longer an option. I was encouraged to take pain relief so I could try to relax and recovery but the one time I gave in and requested it, a nurse refused to give me what the Dr had written up, Panadol and Nurofen. And said I had to pick one. Even though I'd been told to take both at the same time. I never asked for pain relief again.

Breastfeeding was going well until a nurse coerced and bullied me into thinking that I should only feed off 1 breast every 3 hours. Which I did and then my milk supply dropped, my baby lost weight and after 2 days at home she was readmitted. You may wonder why I didn't question this more. But after feeling so downtrodden and being made to feel like 'they' knew better and also the guilt I had from not having the birth I wanted and like I'd let my baby down you do anything they say to try and 'do the right thing'.

When Dr did a check on my newborn baby the morning after she was born he was so rough with her that I felt sick. Relatives in the room also witnessed this and still bring it up with me.

The whole hospital experience and how I was treated by staff took away my ability to tune in to my body and what it innately knew how to do. I lost every ounce of confidence in my mind and bodies ability. It felt like a lived nightmare. And still does to this day- 5 years later.

At a time when I should have felt cared for and supported, I felt a cascade of emotions; scared, alone, confused, let down, terrified and violated.

Birth trauma has impacted my physical body, mental health- including postpartum anxiety, relationship with my partner, ability to be the parent I wanted to be, sleep, trust in the health system, ability to work as for years I didn't feel comfortable to leave my daughter with anyone else.

If I could change one thing to prevent birth trauma and improve care it would be that all birthing people and support people have access to information and resources that are accurate and backed by research about birth. If medical professions could understand that women's bodies are actually designed to birth and could trust in our abilities that would also have a profound impact. Birth should be something we go through not something that 'is done to us'. Another thing that would greatly improve outcome is continuity of care. There also needs to be access to IBCLCs for breastfeeding support.

My biggest regret is that I naively thought that medical professionals had my best interests at heart, were trustworthy and honest. If I could turn back time, I would empower myself through knowledge so that what I experienced would have been less likely to happen as I could have more confidently advocated for myself and my child. The whole situation has left me with a distrust of medical professionals and my local hospital in general. Not ideal when living in a rural area with no other option of hospitals.