

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 13 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

In September 2020 I gave birth at _____ Hospital, NSW.

I gave birth to my daughter within 20mins of arriving at hospital. I got in the bath soon after arriving as this is where I felt most comfortable to labour. I felt the urge to 'push' and the second midwife's concern was to get me out of the bath and/or pull the plug to let the water out. As 'our hospital doesn't do water births'. I was far too in the thick of it to get out so she pulled the plug instead. Even though my baby was crowning and well on the way of being born. Thankfully for me the main midwife quickly soaked towels in the warm water and put them over me so I didn't get cold and could feel more comfortable. Moments later, my daughter was born.

The Dr came in and seemed annoyed he'd missed the birth. He did some paperwork and left.

I kept losing gushes of blood. The midwife phoned to get the Dr back to review me. He didn't come. For the next 8 hours I kept losing quite a lot of blood. Every 30-60min I would hear the midwife phone the Dr with her concerns and asking that he come back to review me. In the meantime, medication, massage and fluid were used to try and slow the bleeding. I was feeling very ill and terrified that I would die due to the blood loss. I remember talking to my husband and telling him to make sure my elder daughter knew I loved her.

When the Dr finally arrived at least 8hrs later, he was in a foul mood. He stated he didn't get any sleep as he kept being called. His phone alarm was going off beeping constantly and when I questioned what the sound was he snapped 'it's my alarm and I'm keeping it on to stay awake'. The midwife was instructed to get the stirrups on the bed. She was struggling a bit so the Dr berated her and spoke very rudely. I was quite scared of the mood of the Dr and his interactions. He was more like an abusive robot than a human being and when he went to try to start examining me and stitching me up without any pain relief I freaked out and said to the midwife that I didn't want him touching me and wanted to get off the bed. She tried to calm me down and said it'd be ok. She told the Dr to wait a moment and requested some pain relief/local anaesthetic. I was still terrified & just lay with tears streaming down my face. It was like a horror movie. I felt abused and violated.

I'd lost over 2 litres of blood. So then instead of going to the maternity ward/rooms. I had to go to High Dependency. Here I experienced verbal abuse from a nurse over night as 'I don't have fucking time for maternity patients. I was also scared for mine and my baby's safety as in the room next door a criminal in shackles and chains was admitted along with 2 prison wardens that stayed with him. As I didn't have my own ensuite I was left to share the same bathroom as the wardens and was terrified of getting an infection as they left it in an unclean manner. I also didn't feel safe leaving my baby in the room so figured my only option was to take them with me. When I went to do this the same nurse verbally abused me yet again. I stay awake the majority of time I was in this 'ward' as I felt I needed to protect my baby and ensure their safety, especially overnight. I insisted on being discharged the next morning.

This hospital experience left me quite traumatised, confused and with a massive distrust of the medical system. I was left wondering why there weren't systems in place within the hospital to locate a different Dr to come and

care for me. Living in a rural area should not jeopardise a patients care. At a time when I should have felt cared for and supported, I felt a terrified, let down and violated.

This instance of birth trauma has impacted my mental health and ability to have any trust or confidence in the health system. What makes this even worse is that living in a small town I run into these staff members and whenever this happens my trauma resurfaces. I saw the Dr from a far in a grocery store and felt instantly physically sick and I just had to get away.

Birth trauma also took away the joy of future pregnancies. When I found out I was pregnant, instead of being excited my first emotion was utter panic about the possibility of having to return to the same hospital. I knew I could not face that. My husband and I knew that our only option was a homebirth with a private practice midwife. Thankfully we had the monetary resources to do this. However, many don't.

If I could change one thing to prevent birth trauma and improve care, it would be for birthing people to have better access to private practice midwives and continuity of care. In an ideal world publicly funded homebirths would be an option. I also think there needs to be systems within hospitals to better address inappropriate conduct by employees and better remediation protocols. Nurses shouldn't be too scared to speak up and make formal complaints about misconduct they see Drs involved in. They should not be too scared to speak up as they are worried, they'll lose their job. I also believe there needs to be a change from Dr led practice to more of a midwifery lead care within hospitals. Drs should not play 'God'. If women are able and want to birth their babies without Drs interventions, then they should. 'I wasn't allowed' should never need to be spoken by a birthing woman. At the end of the day it is our body and we do not owe the Drs anything. Birth shouldn't be a place where we feel like we have to be a 'good girl' in the eyes of Drs or medical teams. We should feel empowered and supported to do what is best for us and our babies.