

**Submission  
No 1382**

## **INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA**

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**Date Received:** 10 August 2023

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I am writing as a woman and a mother, after experiencing obstetric violence during the intrapartum care of my 2nd child in the public hospital system in NSW. After a possible complication with my blood pressure was identified during my pregnancy in 2013, at 36 weeks gestation, I was required to be hospitalised for further investigation at my local public hospital where I had been receiving antenatal care.

The obstetric register who attended to my care on this particular day bullied and coerced me into having a vaginal examination that I clearly did not consent to. When I said I didn't want this, she just kept berating me and threatening that I was being 'silly'. I was heavily pregnant, tired and vulnerable. I had no support in the room with me when she was bullying me into this procedure. She told me she would be doing a quick and gentle vaginal examination 'just to check my cervix'. I finally surrendered under her coercion, as I felt powerless and defeated. She forced her fingers into my vagina without consent, and proceeded to do a procedure called a 'stretch and sweep', which was not discussed or agreed to prior to the procedure. As I felt the pain of her fingers trying to manually tear open my cervix, I screamed and pulled her hand away. She tried to dismiss me by just talking over me saying that it's ok and I was favourable for induction. I told her I didn't want an induction at this point, as I wanted to wait and see if medication would help to resolve my blood pressure and talk about my options with my midwife. She became frustrated and angry, and threw the medical chart she was holding on the floor of the room before storming out. She left me there alone feeling like I had done something wrong. By this point I was bleeding from the vaginal examination she had done. Nobody came to check on me, or asked of my welfare.

The hospital told me I had to be transferred to a larger facility as if I went into labour I could die and they couldn't do anything to help me. After an entire day of bullying and abuse I surrendered, being transferred to a larger hospital. When I was received at the large hospital I saw another obstetrician who told me my condition wasn't serious enough to warrant the transfer. Here I was an hour away from my home, in a hospital I didn't want to birth in, only to find out that it was probably all completely unnecessary. I felt like I had no voice in my care of what happened to me. I reluctantly agreed to an induction of labour at this point, as I felt powerless to choose anything else. I had nobody to advocate for me, and my midwife who had provided care for me in my local hospital in pregnancy was not contacted and was unable to travel one hour to continue her care for me.

The medication that they used for the induction hyper stimulated my uterus, and I birthed in just 2 short hours from the time it was administered. I didn't want to tell anybody that I was in intense labour pain, as I just wanted to be left alone so I just tried to manage the birth myself and downplay what was happening if anyone came to check on me. Luckily I was able to birth my daughter and tell the staff at the very last minute that she was in fact coming out.

After the birth the placenta was taking time to come out. I had declined the use of syntocinon in my birth plan as I wanted a natural 3rd stage, but this was ignored and I was injected with the drug in my leg without consent. After an hour the midwife told me that I would need to go to the operating theatre to have my placenta removed under anaesthetic. As she was preparing me to go to theatre, the doctor entered the room. I had never met her before. She stuck her hand up my vagina and proceeded to try and manually remove my placenta in the room. I have never felt pain like it. Midway through the procedure as I was screaming, the midwife quickly handed me the nitrous gas and said 'quick, suck on this', as she knew that the pain I was in must have been horrific. She also did nothing to stop it.

The placenta came out. I was bleeding heavily so required a further infusion of syntocinin. The midwife and doctor were arguing in the room quietly to each other in front of me. It was late, so they told my husband he had to leave. I was left once again.

The entire episode of care left me feeling robbed of what could and should have been a happy birth experience. From that day on I knew I could never return to the public hospital maternity care system ever again. It was dangerous and abusive.

I went on to have 2 babies following this. Both times I hired my own private midwife and proceeded to have 2 beautiful home births. I regret every day that I ever walked into that public hospital system when I had my daughter in 2013 knowing how much better it could be, and how it actually should be. It caused me lifelong trauma which I hope no woman to ever experience.