

Submission
No 1423

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

The birth of my first child traumatised me. Having been in the public system with a lack of continuity of care was very frightening. No one made me feel safe, seen or valued. At 41 weeks, I was exhausted, it was one of the hottest summers in on record. . I went for a check as I was instructed to do. I presented at Hospital where there was a Locum doctor Dr (absolutely not sure that this is the correct spelling, but I remember because it's an unusual name.) this doctor swanned into the room, did not read my file at all and proceeded to tell me that today I was 41 weeks and we would do a stretch and sweep and then if I didn't go into labour, they would schedule in an induction on Saturday [Due date 4th Jan 2016; Saturday 9th Jan 2016]. I had wished to naturally go into labour and thought my body was capable of doing this. He immediately shut this idea down and said point blank "after 41 weeks, your baby will die." It was said so callously and he meant to fear monger and shame me into submitting to his will. He did not offer any evidence to back this up. I declined again and he pushed. He then said we would do an ultrasound to check the fluid around the baby to see if "it could wait til Saturday". They did this. I'm unsure if he was accurate in his reading of the ultrasound or if he simply did it to placate me and then told me what he wanted to anyway. He said that the fluid was declining around the baby and that we better do the stretch and sweep to see if we can get labour to happen. I didn't want to. He forced me to consent by using words that made me

Anxious and stressed and shamed into doing what he wanted to. I cried the whole time he performed this "procedure" and the nurse held my hand and patted my hair. I could tell that she was wild about how he treated me. My partner held my other hand and anxiously watched. I felt powerless and dehumanised. It was uncomfortable and it hurt. I cannot even get papsmears without having debilitating anxiety now. It's also affected my sex life. The nurse made sure she put on my file to not let him near me again and I didn't see him over the next few days. She recommended at this time that I make a

Formal Complaint, but the severe mental distress this caused me and the cascade of events that followed plus having a baby, going back to work, my partner losing his job and the mental health roller coaster since this event has essentially prevented me from

Getting around to it. Even as I am writing this, I can feel the tension in my body, throat and chest.

Following this procedure, i was in shock. I started to feel nauseous and couldn't eat, I started having cramps that evening and contractions that were extremely painful. They would occur every 10 minutes and then get closer and then lengthen out. I rang the hospital at least twice. They told me to stay at home until they were much closer together. I couldn't sleep, I was in and out of the shower all night, as the warm water was all to at eased the discomfort. Eventually, the hospital relented and asked me to come in. I was shivering and shaking and so, so tired. They checked and said I wasn't even actively in labour, which made me cry because I was already so

Tied. They gave me something to try and help me be in less pain and to help me sleep. I managed an hour before the pain was too much again. At this time, I think they got me something to induce labour. After some time, I experienced my bloody show and I called the nurse in to help me up to the labour suite. My waters were not broken. This is where things are not clear. I know I had morphine and gas and water injections in the back, as my baby was posterior, birth was very painful and the contractions were unbearable. The midwife had to break my waters at the last second, when I was 9-10cm. I was so sleep deprived and I'm so much pain, I do not know what I was consenting to. There was a serious lack of informed consent. As informed consent implies that you get risk vs. benefit of all procedures performed, why they are being performed etc. I feel that if the first doctor had never come into my birth journey, that perhaps I wouldn't have had this cascade of interventions. I also had a second degree tear that should have had stitches but frankly, I didn't want local there or anyone else doing anything else down there.

My baby was 7lb9oz and she was fine. She wasn't in there too long. Due dates are not exact science and babies do come in their own time. I wish that there was more patient centred care delivered. I do not mean the facade of patient centred care, where effectively, providers do what they want by emotionally manipulating women into consenting to procedures and interventions based on whatever the doctor is trying to do ie. hurry things along. More time needs to be spent informing women of their options, the interventions that might be used and why they would need to be used. The use of fear tactics incites more fear and then increases the need for intervention.

The lasting effects this experience has had on me have been serious. After the morphine, I didn't not sleep (I'm one of few people who experiences night terrors and insomnia after it's use) and this really affected my ability to rest, bond with my baby and I have been in fight or flight apparently ever since this. I developed an autoimmune disease that has roots in the dysfunction and stress response, hashimotos, after having my first and have suffered ever since. Last year my mental health was so severe that when I sought help, my psychologist came back to this event in my life as one of my biggest triggers.

I am grateful to have this opportunity to share my experience and I hope that it can instigate change for the better so that no women have to experience things as I did, or as so many of my girlfriends or our mothers or grandmothers did. I want better for my sisters and my daughters.