

Submission
No 1387

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a mother of four, with my most recent being 2 months old. I had to receive counselling in my most recent pregnancy to help deal with all of the emotions surrounding my previous births. I feel like I really don't want to think about it or write about it right now as I've just recently had my final session with a psychologist and it was such an emotionally difficult time for me however I also feel like I need to speak up for the women who have experienced similar, in the hope that one day things will improve.

Basically, with my first pregnancy, I did all I knew at the time to ensure I would have the natural delivery that I wanted. My waters broke the day before I ended up having what was labelled as a 'emergency' caesarean due to a range of factors including risk of infection being higher, tiredness from a long labour, slow progress and my baby's positioning being posterior (which I was only told about at 7cm dilated and had no idea at the time of what could possibly be done in labour to turn baby etc). My baby was never once in distress. I was given a drip to induce my contractions at one point and that was not working. It was simply making my contractions stronger but I was not progressing past 7cm. I was a first time labouring mother who fully put my trust in the public maternity system. I agreed to the caesarean and my discharge paperwork provided the reason 'failure to progress' as the reason for my caesarean. At the time I was a brand new mother who had gone in and tried my best for a vaginal delivery and I genuinely felt that I had failed. I now believe that the system failed me. Although I know I could have still ended up with a caesarean, I also now know that the team who I was entrusted to at the time failed to wait. The term failure to progress really affected me and I wish it wasn't used. I felt like I could have done something differently. Like I should have been more educated. Like I should have known more. That if I did, I would have been able to succeed and have a natural delivery. I wasn't offered any form of debrief following the birth other than a quick ward visit to explain what had happened. I buried these feelings until it came time to have my second.

During my second pregnancy I developed gestational diabetes. I was told that there were much higher risks with a natural delivery and that a caesarean would be the safer option for me and my baby. I was also told that because I had experienced slow progress in my first labour, it would 'more than likely happen again' and that if I chose to deliver naturally I would need to be induced early due to the gestational diabetes. I took the advice of health professionals and went on to have my second child. Following the birth I had the usual visit to the ward where things were explained. No real debrief. But this time I was told that any future births would have to be a caesarean. At no point in my second pregnancy had any of the medical professionals responsible for my care told me this. Again, I felt like I had made a choice with the best knowledge I had at the time in order to keep myself and my baby safe. I was terrified of 'failing' again and I was terrified that I was putting my baby at risk if I went into labour naturally later than the doctor would have liked. Looking back, I was a busy mum juggling work and a toddler and I simply didn't have the time to look into it all more. I went with the health advice given to me at the time and I regretted not pushing harder for my Vbac, not knowing more, not informing myself better etc. I felt let down and depressed about the whole thing and the fact I'd been through it twice.

When I had my third I had an elective caesarean as I was told that a natural delivery was not an option for me. Like my second pregnancy in the public hospital I experienced a range of midwives, no real continuity of care. I didn't even know that being asked to be put in a caseload was an option back then. I had no idea. My anaesthetist procedure was stressful but that came down to the anaesthetist herself and her bedside manner and skill level, not the maternity care itself. This time I felt like less of a failure, like the choice was truly out of my hands. It wasn't until my four that all the feeling resurfaced. It was around 30 plus weeks of pregnancy that I found out women were now being offered Vbac a following 2 caesareans but not 3. I had settled myself by that time with the fact that I was not having a Vba3c. But all the emotions came rushing back. This time I was in the private system with an obstetrician who was Vbac tolerant for someone in my position. I had gestational diabetes and was told that if I had a natural delivery I would need to be induced at 39 weeks. I was also told that I would no longer be cared for if I tried to bring a doula or private midwife to my labour. I was told my husband, the obstetrician and the midwife in the hospital would be 'enough'. I was told that the risks were too high of ending up with a dead baby. I was told 'I will support you but so will be terrified', I was told 'If it were me I would be having a caesarean'. In the end I went with the caesarean. I had to have counselling with someone who specialises in obstetric counselling because of this whole experience and I wish I had been more informed so that my journey could have been different. Hopefully my submission makes a difference.