

**Submission  
No 1373**

## **INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA**

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**Date Received:** 7 August 2023

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It started with a gushing feeling as I stood up from the couch at 37 weeks pregnant.

I thought it was my waters so I went to the toilet to check. But it was fresh red blood. A lot of it. It didn't stop gushing out.

I rang the hospital and the midwife seemed annoyed. She asked if I had to come in and I said yes, this wasn't a normal experience. I didn't feel supported but that was just the beginning.

The drive to the hospital was scary. Over every bump, more blood would gush out. I didn't know what was happening.

I got to the hospital, got monitored and a doctor in scrubs, and a mask, so I could only see her fearful eyes, gave me a caesarean consent form and said I was having a placental abruption and the surgical suite was prepped, ready to go.

I was in shock. I was in the Midwife Group Practice program and planning a vaginal birth. I signed the form because I wanted to do what was best for my baby but I definitely was not informed about what I had signed up for or any options available to me. I was at my most vulnerable.

I got to theatre and I remember someone telling me I had to bend over more to get the spinal in but my belly took up all the space and I physically couldn't bend any more. I kept trying and more and more blood kept gushing out.

I had to remind the staff to let my partner into the room. They had already done all the tests on me and were about to start surgery.

I had a post-partum haemorrhage on the table and my partner said the blood was being wiped off the floor with any available towel. This submission doesn't touch on the trauma felt by my partner, but I assure you that childbirth impacts everybody in the room.

I was laying on the table, shaking from the drugs in my system as my baby was pulled from my body and held up over the curtain for us to see. Then he was gone. The surgical staff started counting out loud. I couldn't see anything. I couldn't see my baby. I thought they were counting as they were doing CPR on my son. I yelled out "is everything ok?!" No one told me what they were doing. It was terrifying. They were only counting surgical instruments, but I had no context for that. Nothing was explained to me.

My son needed oxygen and was taken to the special care nursery before I could even touch him. I told my partner to go with my son so he wouldn't be alone. But I was. I was left alone in a sterile room with people I didn't know as I lay naked on a table without my baby. The anaesthetists were chatting amongst themselves about their weekend plans. I had just become a mother and had the biggest experience of my life and that was not respected at all.

To health professionals this is their job day in and day out and they check out of the human element of their work, but to me, it was a life changing experience. The first time I transitioned from maiden to mother. And that should have been celebrated. Instead, I was ignored.

I was the only one in recovery and was still without my baby. I had just carried him for eight months and suddenly separated. Nothing felt right. I had no updates. I had no idea what was happening with him.

When I finally got upstairs my son was able to come into my room. I held him and just wondered what the heck happened. I was still in shock. I didn't sleep at all that night.

My partner thankfully was able to stay with me in the room at hospital and I don't know how I would have managed without him. I couldn't get up and if baby was in the crib crying I couldn't get to him. I really feel for any mother who doesn't have support in those moments because when your baby is crying it's like literal alarm bells in your body and you want to act fast to comfort them. I just held him all night, comforting both of us, after the trauma we had both experienced.

I had nurses and midwives coming in all night. All with different, and sometimes conflicting, opinions. This was a trend our entire stay in hospital and was frustrating to say the least. Everyone had something to say but no one cared about what I wanted.

One of the doctors who had done my emergency caesarean came in the next morning saying everything went well. I have no idea what scale she was using. She asked if I had any questions but after a night of no sleep and probably still in shock, I didn't have many. It was only later that I found out that this conversation constituted a birth debrief in the hospital's eyes. This is not enough! Especially after a traumatic experience.

I also felt let down by the hospital during my postpartum experience. My baby and I were treated as a number, not individuals with an individual experience, but that's a story for another inquiry.

Mothers and women deserve a better experience. In birth, and in life.