

Submission
No 1433

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I have been a Registered Midwife since the beginning of 2019 working in the NSW public system since. I trained and worked for 3 years in a tertiary Sydney Hospital in both standard midwifery and midwifery group practice. I am now working in a rural referral hospital in a regional centre. When I moved to country NSW my expectation was that women here would receive the same sort of maternity care as women in the city just on a smaller scale. Instead I have been shocked and appalled at the lack of options women here have.

In both of settings I have seen disrespectful and coercive maternity care. The standard systems in place in hospitals are designed to get women through the service as efficiently as possible, like a factory, with little consideration of their individual needs. On a weekly basis I hear maternity care providers talk about women behind their backs in ways that are racist, sexist and demeaning. And on a weekly basis I see women given misleading information, pressured into accepting interventions that suit the system rather than the woman's preferences.

One such example, occurred only a couple of weeks ago. I was caring for a young teenager on birth unit having her first baby. She was labouring spontaneously and had been making steady but normal progress throughout the day. She was calm and managing really well, starting to show signs of being ready to push her baby out. I had just begun discussing with her that if she was happy I could do an internal examination to make sure her cervix was completely gone before she started pushing (an intervention for which there is no evidence for but that hospital protocol mandates I offer her) when the locum obstetrician, whom I, nor this woman had never met came into the room, loudly, and uninvited. He told the woman in a patronising tone that she had been making too slow a progress and that he wanted to examine her. I explained to him that we had just been discussing doing an examination and that I would be happy telling him my findings after I had done the assessment. He then asked to speak to me outside the room to which I agreed. He then explained to me that we had a gap in the obstetric coverage that afternoon and that he would be finishing about an hour before the next obstetrician would come on and so that if this woman needed a caesarean we needed to do it as soon as possible. I then told him that I was quite confident this woman was fully dilated and would have no reason to need a caesarean at this time and that considering her age and some other vulnerabilities she had that it would be more appropriate for me to do the examination because I had been working with her all day. He then insisted that he needed to do the examination as he was more senior and needed to be sure she was fully dilated. Unable to argue further, I went back into the room and explained to the woman that the obstetrician would be performing the examination and she agreed to move to the bed. Much to my horror the obstetrician then performed the examination without properly asking her for consent saying "I just examining you now" as his fingers entered her vagina. I wish I had been able to speak up but I was speechless and then he proceeded to break her waters, a significant intervention with risks, again without asking for consent. All he said was "I'm just breaking your waters now".

I have seen this kind of care far, far too often. I am tired and worn down by feeling complicit in a system that traumatises women. I feel that my midwifery carer

On the postnatal ward I see so many women who emerge from their births shattered, confused and hurt because of things we have done to them.

I know it doesn't have to be this way because I have experienced what good respectful maternity care can be myself. When I had my own baby I was still living in the city and I had

the choice of having my care through the midwifery group practice that I was working in at the time. I had my own midwife who knew me and cared for me holistically. I felt informed and I was allowed to make my own decisions about my body and my baby that were respected even if they wavered from hospital policy. When I was in labour, the midwives supported me amazingly by doing very little. They just let my body labour and birth physiologically and I knew I was in control the whole time. The hours and days after having my baby were euphoric, I was so in love with my baby and proud of myself. I felt so confident and comfortable. It was the best start to motherhood. They were honestly the best days of my life. It breaks my heart that we rob so many women of feeling this way.

Now that I live in the country, if I have another baby I won't have midwifery group practice as an option. I feel really disappointed not to experience this again and honestly a little frightened of what could happen to me or my baby in a fragmented model of care. This is despite all the knowledge I have - so what hope do other women living here have.

There is so much evidence to show the benefit of midwifery continuity of care. I really feel that if we gave every woman this option, regardless of where they live, many women would be saved from birth trauma.