

Submission
No 1368

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Birth Experience 2011-2012
, NSW

Pregnancy (2011):

- I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes(GD) because NSW Health had just lowered the marker (which was lower than all other western countries) and even though I was only .5 out, it meant I had to go through the system. My GP explained that if I had chosen to go through my private health insurance, I would not have been diagnosed with GD.
- The GD program was awful – a hundred women every Thursday, most heavily pregnant, left standing in a room at the for usually around 2 hours. All of us waiting for our turn to be seen by a nutritionist and doctor for just 10 minutes. I didn't need insulin as my GD was low and I was able to manage it through diet. It felt like we were part of data collecting and/ a trial– if it was transparent and we were asked if we'd like to participate in a trial then that would have been more humane.
- As I was already going through the Birth Centre, when it came through that I was in the GD range, the midwife said I was not allowed to go through the Birth Centre anymore. They wouldn't take on anyone who had any slight 'abnormalities' in their pregnancy. I had to fight to be able to stay with the birth centre. Every time I went in thereafter, I was made to feel like there was something wrong with me and that I was on thin ice being there.
- The midwife asked, 'do you have any support'? And I said yes, my partner is supportive, he will be there. And that was that. In hindsight, I now know that I needed at least one more support person to be able to be with me during the whole 30-hour labour - someone who could take over from my partner when he needed to rest or eat, and someone with experience – a doula or another midwife. If the midwife told me at that point that I really needed to consider having a second person, that would have made a world of difference on the night. I was also not warned that the midwife assigned to me at the time of birth would not be available the whole time, that I could/would be left for hours on end as I had the impression that a midwife was there for you like a doula would be, which is why I didn't think I needed a doula. **If our birthing system cannot afford to allocate one midwife per birth, I would strongly suggest that all pregnant women be advised to have a minimum of 2 support people present with them for their entire birth, as well in the weeks after.**

Birth (2012):

- Our baby was late and because of the GD diagnosis, they would not let me go over much, I think it was only 4 days max, which is what it was, and then they induced, which I did not want but felt I had no choice.
- They did the first sweep, and then thankfully, after two hours my waters broke at home which means I did not need the next level of inducement and we came back to the hospital. However, they sent us back home even though I had contractions all through the night and next morning, I could not sleep or eat or do anything, but they had told me not to come in until the contractions were more intense. This began during the afternoon, so we went back to hospital and were finally admitted into the birth center. The midwife I thought I would have was at the end of her shift and then another one I had not met who was quite abrupt and difficult was the midwife for the rest of my labour.
- It turned out to be a very busy night with many babies ready to be born, and there were not enough midwives and not enough rooms. **I was lucky enough to get a room, but there were women who had to birth in the closet!! I found this incredibly distressing while I was in labour.** The first (lovely)midwife explained that I was lucky to get a room because it was my first birth, and the ones who were birthing in the hall and closet were having their second or third babies and that their labours would most likely be faster. It was incredibly worrying to think about while I was in labour.
- **The midwife left me for hours on end** with my partner because it was such a busy evening and there were not enough midwives. She seemed stressed and 'put out' at the times she was present with me. From the time we arrived at the hospital to the time of birth, it was 13 hours.
- I spent hours in the bath, and at some point, I began to feel the pushing sensation. I asked my partner to find the midwife to let her know (she was not responding to the buzzer). At first, he couldn't find her anywhere and there was no one at the desk for him to ask. He went out again and found someone, said she would come but then didn't, when she finally did, **she told me to stop pushing, that I could not be ready because last time she'd checked I was only at 4 centimeters (which was possibly hours earlier).** So, I spent the next few hours trying to resist pushing. I felt **confused because I felt my body was telling me it was time, but the midwife wouldn't check me and I felt that she was the expert, not me - her behaviour made me question myself.** Finally, I insisted my partner get her back and that she checks, **so I got onto the bed and when she reluctantly checked I was 10 centimeters.** So, she told me to push, but I'd already been resisting the pushing for hours which meant by the time she told me to push I was exhausted. I pushed for another 3 hours but I was utterly exhausted, having been awake for 24 hours, no food, and very little midwifery support. **She made me feel weak and that I wasn't pushing hard enough.** She said she could see the baby's head and I just needed to push

harder but with each push I had nothing left. She then told me I had a choice to stay here and keep trying or to get a caesarean, and she made me feel like it was a bad choice. So, I said I'd stay. I tried more but my body and heart told me I needed help. So, I said I need to go. She made me feel very weak. She put me in a wheelchair and then when we got to the hall that crosses into the main hospital, she left me without a word. A midwife from the maternity ward at _____ came and wheeled me into the epidural room. I was in tears from feeling like I'd failed, from exhaustion, and fear of what was to come. The new midwife leant down to my ear as she wheeled me across the hall and said, "I want you to know that this is not your fault". It was exactly what I needed to hear, I felt supported for the very first-time during labour – 26 hours into my labour.

- That midwife wanted me to try pushing a bit longer – the obstetrician was pacing in the hall, but she said she did not want to let him in yet because once she did, he would take over. But at this point I thought I was going to die; I was so exhausted. She let him in, he said to try pushing but I had nothing left. He didn't linger after that, and preparations were made for surgery.
- The epidural was awful in that I had to sign the paper, I was shaking from pain and exhaustion, and then I needed to resist the pushing again while they got the needle in. This took about ½ hour. Once that happened it was all very quick – I was whisked off to surgery, my partner nearby always, and our daughter was born at 6:34am. The relief was incredible. The surgeon and anaesthetist were both very comforting and that helped a lot. They said that our daughter had the cord around her neck (which may have been the reason she was not able to come all the way through the birth canal) but was healthy and full of vitality. I was able to see her as she came out. And my partner was able to hold her straight away. And then her oxygen was checked. My partner was able to stay with her while I was taken off for recovery. The shaking lasted for an hour or so.
- We had a room in the maternity ward. I was able to hold my daughter then.

After birth:

- The feeding was the next difficulty. She wouldn't attach to my breast and was crying all the time. The midwives would not give me a break to rest. And the milk wasn't coming through. After 48 hours, in the middle of the night I begged them to give her a little bit of formula as she was starving, but they wouldn't, and my milk still wasn't flowing. I just wanted my baby to be fed. The midwife was forceful trying to put my baby on my breast, but she wouldn't attach. It was very traumatic. Finally, the midwife let me give her some formula and I felt I could rest a bit so my milk could flow. The next day a breastfeeding consultant stopped in, and she was amazing – she put my daughter on my belly and let her crawl up to the breast and with a flick of her fingers she tipped my daughter's head, and she was able to attach.

- The experience of being in the maternity ward was not pleasant. I wanted to go home to be comfortable, on day four that breastfeeding consultant saw my frustration and signed release papers so that I could leave. We left on day four but underprepared as my partner was already back at work, I had no family or friend support, so I spent hours alone with my newborn every day, trying to figure it out on my own, and heal from the c section. A midwife came 3 times over a period of two weeks to check on my scar and the baby. It was helpful but not enough for my situation.
- At this time my mother was also suffering greatly from her RA and was dying, as I was one of her main carers before the birth, it was extremely difficult to manage my time and energy between being a new mum while losing my mum. I felt incredibly isolated. My Mum died 3 years later but needed continual care from multiple surgeries. With a lot of work, I was able to finally get outside care for her during her last 6 months of life (palliative care isn't readily available for people with chronic/autoimmune illnesses – another parliamentary inquiry needed!)

Thank you for the opportunity to share my birth experience. I couldn't voice my complaints to the hospital after the birth because of the stressful situation of learning to be a new mum while caring for my dying mother. I have not been able to include names of those who have been helpful, as well as those who haven't, as I did not have the capacity to remember any of their names due to the trauma of the experience, which is something I would normally be able to do. This entire birth experience - including the pre- and post-natal care - has had a huge impact on why we did not have any more children. It has greatly affected my life, my capacity to work, and my trust in the current systems in place for birthing and female related matters.