

Submission
No 1437

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

First labour, my age 27 yrs:

October 2005 I gave birth to my first son via 'emergency caesarean' at _____ Hospital NSW. What was meant to be a happy event meeting our baby did not go to plan and was very traumatic for myself and my husband.

During birth I was subject to bullying, degradation, physical violence and disrespectful care. This included, the obstetrician, Dr _____, who was on call being very nasty and rude to myself and my husband during labour, extremely rough handling of my vagina and nasty words spoken to me demanding me to keep my mouth shut when I cried in pain during his violent handling and very unnecessary jabbing with a needle and vaginal examinations. I believe, he was not 'happy' to be called in during the last half hour of his shift. I believe he took that frustration out on me and my body... a young, new mother who had never been in labour before.

Only to be sent to theatre. I was told my baby was posterior and was 'stuck'. My son was born with marks on his forehead that scabbed later from the heavy handling by the obstetrician whilst my son was in my birth canal.

On later requesting of my notes, it simply stated the emergency caesarean was only due to me being 'tired'. Not true and if so, why would this be reason enough for a caesarean?

I was a 'good girl' and followed the nasty words of the obstetrician and was far too scared to tell them while I was waiting to be wheeled into theatre for a procedure I did not want, that my body had naturally started pushing, due to my silence (I did not utter a single sound from the moment I was told to shut my mouth) I was wheeled to surgery.

One of the worst moments for me was painful and nasty attacking of my vagina with a needle and being told 'if I'm going to make those noises I need to shut my mouth' when I was groaning and crying in pain from his violent attacking and abuse. And my petrified fear of a needle in my spine and the panic at feeling as though I could feel being cut open. The anaesthetist was very nice and calmed me and actually listened to my panic and fear and the 'new' obstetrician, who was now on call as Dr _____ had finished his shift, was nice and compassionate with me during the caesarean.

At this time when I should have felt cared for and supported I felt belittled, scared, degraded, abused, powerless and violated in the most intimate way by Dr _____

Birth trauma impacted my bonding with my new baby, who was also traumatised from the birth. And the postpartum was impacted by the recovery of a caesarean, also impacting my ability to mother my new baby.

Second labour, my age 31:

In June 2009 I gave birth to my second child at _____ Private. After my first traumatic birth experience, I left nothing to chance and worked hard to mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically prepare myself for the labour. I sourced a private obstetrician who would 'allow me' to 'attempt' a VBAC.

I had decided that going private was surely better than going through the public system again locally that had so devastatingly let me down.

For the most part, the obstetrician was nice and pleasant, and my pregnancy was non-eventful, which worked in my favour of endeavouring to have my VBAC.

The night I went into labour, the midwife who greeted us upon arrival and was there for the birth was lovely, compassionate and listened to and respected my birth plan, which was no VE's or interventions at all, I have no complaints about her and am grateful for her compliance in my birth plan which my husband advocated the whole time.

Once the obstetrician arrived that morning for his rounds he saw me and requested I get out of the bath, and get on the bed for a VE. I said 'no' multiple times, and begged not to, he refused to allow me to continue without a VE. I reluctantly obliged and during the VE, he decided without any consulting with me to break my waters. I screamed and begged not to and withstood the strong urge to horse kick him to the wall. Instead I reached around and tried to remove his hand and arm but he kept pushing me away and continued with his agenda of breaking my waters. I was powerless and felt completely violated on all levels that I had worked so hard to build up and trust after my first birth and the only time during this labour was in pain. Until then my labour was the most beautiful experience.

As he left he stated arrogantly to the midwife that I was 'hours off' and to contact him once I was closer. Those moments were the worst for me during my labour.

It was barely 20-30 minutes later that my body naturally began to push and he was called back down. From there I birthed my second child naturally and vaginally without any issues.

I've never forgotten the feeling in those moments, the betrayal and violation I felt are still so raw 14 years later, regardless of the rest of the labour and birth being the most amazing experience... it is tainted with those moments that left me feeling physically abused.

Third pregnancy; miscarriage 10 weeks, my age 38:

February 2017 I suffered a miscarriage.

I've always thought to myself that I'm lucky to have a strong mindset and worry for those who do not in certain circumstances in life. This is another example in my life that I am grateful for a strong mental self.

I was told I needed to report my miscarriage I reluctantly rang as I just didn't understand why I had to put myself through a phone call.

The person on the other end of the line was very abrupt, short, matter of fact and lacking any type of compassion. Questions were fired at me like I was simply a number they had to type data about their end. I was simply just another phone call, another call in the days work to them.

This left me feeling empty, unimportant, even annoying and a burden to have had to take my information. To this day I wish I just didn't make that phone call. I was left dumbfounded once I hung up the phone. What was I just submitted to and why? I remember telling my husband that if women who had suffered multiple miscarriages were told to make that call each time it would be trauma on trauma and so devastatingly awful for them.

A miscarriage is a very lonely thing to experience and to be put through that rigmarole seems very unnecessarily cruel.

What would work is someone who has had trauma training, has empathy and compassion and can gently enquire about the woman's experience tenderly and be able to ascertain if they aren't coping with the call.

Or

Do we have to be put through this at all? I wonder what the gain was for my experience and can't imagine many others were greeted tenderly on the phone either.

Fourth pregnancy, third labour, my age 45:

In May 2023 I gave birth to my surprise baby in a birthing pool, in my bedroom, surrounded by my family (husband, two teenage boys) at home. Supported by my private midwife and her midwife partner.

I have zero complaints about this birth. I believe this is how birthing should be. The best model of care for pregnancy, labour and also importantly, postpartum.

My complaints with this pregnancy is with the private obstetrician I was initially under the care of.

Early pregnancy tests showed a 50/50 chance of our baby having Trisomy 13. We got this result 2 hours before meeting our obstetrician for the first time. We had booked into Private under the care of private obstetrician.

She cared for us through the multiple ultrasounds, blood tests and amniocentesis until we were given the result of our baby being cleared of any genetic mutations. He was perfectly healthy. She was supportive, encouraging, understanding and empathetic to our situation due to her herself having experienced something very similar at the same age as me with her last pregnancy.

It was after this supportive care that the wheels fell off.

Each visit she would question me about booking a caesarean in, saying she wouldn't be able to 'tell if my body could deliver naturally until a VE in week 38 gestation.'

Any time I asked about her stand on natural, no intervention birthing she would evade the question saying 'It's too early to talk about that, there's time, we will talk closer, I won't know anything until later in the pregnancy' and so on.

I was more and more uneasy with each visit and left each visit feeling unheard, brushed to the side, my questions were not important, my want for natural a big ask.

I knew I would not be able to get out of the VE at 38 weeks which scared me. I also knew once in labour, I would not be able to properly advocate for myself and battle her for my birth wishes. I was too old for this fight again and just didn't think I should have to fight for it. I knew I needed to change my model of care.

Being asked each visit about booking a caesarean and dismissing my enquires on how she functions in a birthing suite is medically coercive as far as I'm concerned.

That's when I found our private midwife who showed me how beautiful and amazing pregnancy, labour, birthing and postpartum care could be and should be.

Not the medically coercive experience I had previously had with the private obstetrician.

After having experienced an emergency caesarean in a public hospital, natural VBAC in a private hospital with private male obstetrician and care from a private female obstetrician and finally the continuity of care from a private midwife and experiencing a homebirth, I feel as though I am experienced enough in multiple models to say that I believe every woman should have the opportunity to access the model of care that I and my family experienced with our homebirth and private midwife. It should not be only for those families that can afford it and should be subsidised and covered by healthcare especially considering there is zero burden with these births on the medical system.