

Submission  
No 1472

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I felt supported throughout my labour by a wonderful midwife and incredible student who followed my journey through pregnancy, however I had a prolonged pushing stage without an epidural that resulted in a forceps delivery. I will never forget the feeling of three midwives pushing as hard as they could on my stomach as the doctor pulled as hard and she could on my baby's head which came out but then began "turtling" back in causing shoulder dystocia. A second but successful attempt with the forceps safely delivered my baby and the paediatric team rushed to complete their assessments as bub was on my chest. While I understand now why this instrumental-assisted delivery needed to be done, after the high of the birth settled, I was left feeling rattled and ashamed, having flashbacks for weeks of the birth, crying just thinking about it and replaying the hands pushing on my stomach while feeling as though I had left my body. The thought of my routine post-partum pap smear and recommencing sex was terrifying as having anything near my vagina after an episiotomy, forceps and several medical staff completing checks was nerve-wracking. I felt that I had failed my baby by not allowing her a peaceful entry into the world. I don't fault the staff that helped deliver my baby safely, nor those that were present for my labour, however I am disappointed when I think of the aftermath of my care. I was offered a birth debrief with a renowned midwife consultant at the hospital (who was present during my last 30 minutes of pushing) and was told that they would likely be in touch to arrange an appointment. I left without this happening and when a midwife came the two days later to check bub, I asked after this and was told they would email and hopefully someone would be in touch. Several more weeks passed and while myself and my partner delighted in our bub, we could hardly speak about the birth without crying for several months. My mother who was also present at the birth of my baby, sought her own counselling for a debrief as she felt she had failed to advocate strongly enough for me and struggled with the images of me screaming for help teamed with the sudden rush of medical staff who entered to room as things progressed.

Eventually, I found the courage to phone the hospital to ask about the debrief I had been offered and was told that the midwife consultant was on extended leave but my details would be passed on to the acting midwife consultant. A few weeks later I received a call from this consultant who shared that a formal debrief wasn't available, but they could try and arrange an appointment with an obstetrician. The midwife read some of my notes from my birth to me that almost did not even sound like my baby's birth. The midwife informed me that my notes stated that I had an additional perineal "laceration" additional to the episiotomy, something I hadn't been informed of. The midwife ended the call saying she would phone me back tomorrow with the appointment details with the obstetrician. Approximately, 2 weeks later I received a letter from the obstetrician's clinic with the appointment details for a few months times and requesting I come with a GP's referral. This felt like a never-ending process, almost like I had to prove I even birthed at the hospital in order to speak to someone about it. I also had to repeat my story for the umpteenth time to someone. The appointment with the obstetrician did give me and my partner some helpful answers and explained the reasons why things had gone the way they did, but it was a 15-minute appointment that felt rushed. I did ask about the perineal "laceration" I did not know about and the obstetrician stated that this was not something I needed to worry or know about. I felt embarrassed and disturbed as this was something that had happened to my own body yet I could not clarify what it meant – I still don't know.

I work as a healthcare professional within a hospital, and I see myself as someone with strong health literacy. However, advocating for myself was so hard and scary and I can't help but wonder about those who have birthed and their supporters who may not have been able to seek support after a traumatic birth and continue to suffer in silence. There needs to be more post-partum care for birthing parents, including routine exploration around the birth and whether emotional support

is required. I understand in my case that it could not be helped that the original midwife consultant who runs debriefs was on leave, but I hope a lesson is to be learnt in the future from this. I also feel that birthing partners should be considered when it comes to traumatic births as I have seen how this closely impacted both my partner and my mother.