

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

In June 2019 I had my third child at a NSW regional hospital. My two previous births at a different hospital had no complications, were vaginal, I required no interventions or pain relief and were both very positive experiences.

During the lead up to my third birth three moments impacted on my feeling of safety at the hospital. 1)The first was the blasé suggestion that if my baby is not in a good position that 'it's fine, you'll just have to have a caesarean', 2)the obstetrician at approx. 30week check up ridiculed me when I stated that I have been encouraging good positioning by doing yoga and other manoeuvres, 3)and then subsequently used my leg as a physical support to lean across me to reach something off a table. At no point did the midwife present advocate for me during these moments. These early experiences gave me a feeling of disempowerment and anxiety leading up to the birth.

I was 10 days overdue so was encouraged to be induced. My induction was set for 8am on a morning in June. I had communicated to the midwife the day before that my baby often moved up out of pelvis overnight as I could feel this, whereas in the evening he sat lower down. She assured me it would be okay after an assessment. I was relaxed and excited about welcoming my baby. My midwife attempted to break my waters once unsuccessfully and commented that she couldn't feel a head. A second midwife tried twice more. After this my baby moved up out of my pelvis and they stopped the induction. I was encouraged to go for a walk. The midwives attempted to use a portable ultrasound machine but no one knew how to use it so they couldn't check positioning so they sent me down to imaging with a student midwife. At some point my waters broke. I was told by baby was in transverse position. I knew then that I wouldn't be able to birth vaginally.

I ran back through the hospital to the birthing unit quite distressed and in a panic was trying all I could to encourage my baby to move back into head down position. Five minutes later the obstetrician barged in unannounced and with no introduction started to yell at me to get off the floor and stated how inconvenienced she was as she was just in theatre prep and now had to attend to me. My husband responded with 'who the fuck are you'. The obstetrician then proceeded (in between instructing me to get on the bed) to engage in an argument with my husband about how offended she was that someone had sworn at her. She vaginally assessed me. There was no cord prolapse, my baby was not in distressed. She told me that I needed an emergency caesarean under a general anaesthetic and while a swarm of people rushed in to prepare me she told me that there was a high likely hood by baby's limbs would be broken and that I would need to be cut horizontal and vertical. Her tone was forceful and I felt like I had no choice, no control, I was at fault and I was scared.

I was rushed to theatres and the last thing I remember was having a cannula put in and telling the nurse next to me 'I'm scared'.

During my time in theatres, no one stayed with my husband, no one comforted him. I don't remember meeting my baby, and 4 years on this is a painful story to tell.

The following experiences after the caesarean impacted further on this trauma.

- 1) no one offered referral to counselling.
- 2) No one acknowledged the trauma
- 3) No one admitted fault to making mistakes.
- 4) I was told that I couldn't have stronger pain medication after calling the hospital on my first day at home with my stressed husband, 2 small children and little support because "they're addicted". I felt like my pain wasn't justified and felt like they thought I was a drug addict rather than someone who had just had major surgery.
- 5) No one checked in with my husband
- 6) I had a drain coming out of my wound after surgery which I needed to carry around with me for the first few days after birth. Then during one of the first nights the tube moved and caused an

excruciating amount of pain to which the emergency Dr. reviewing responded to with “I’ve never seen one of these before”. I have since learnt this practice is quite outdated.

On a day where I should have felt an immense amount of joy, empowerment and love, I felt disconnected, sad and scared. The first few days were a blur and to this day I feel like I missed the birth of my third son. I missed the first nappy change, the first touch, the first person to reach him when he woke upset. I missed the first moments with him and my two other children and husband. I was a mess, I cried a lot the first few weeks. The following months I avoided the hospital at all costs. I was fearful of going out into town and seeing midwives and the obstetrician who performed the surgery and when I did I froze.

To this day my trauma is real – I become sad and tearful thinking of those first moments with my boy. I have a general fear of hospitals and deep mistrust of doctors and hospital staff. The last time I went to hospital emergency room for something minor I experienced a severe panic attack.

I feel like I did not get the opportunity to bond with my son like I should have and that this has impacted on who I am today but also my relationship with him, my parenting and his emotional development. I have a constant sense of guilt for when I missed out on him and I am forever trying to make up for it.

My husband also experienced trauma following the birth, which has impacted his mental health and he is extremely mistrusting of midwives and doctors. All of this has had a huge impact on our family’s wellbeing and taken years to unpack, accept and move forward from.

It took the birth of my fourth child at home (which was a challenge in itself to go against the strong recommendation of the local health district that I shouldn’t have a baby at home) to re-empower me as a woman and mother. Despite this the pain I feel thinking of the day my third son came into the world has not gone away. I was lucky that physically we are both thriving. I wonder if emotionally things would be different if I was seen and heard, believed, supported and apologised to, and made to believe that it was not my fault.