

Submission
No 1348

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my first child in 2018, an experience that has led me to experience PTSD.

I was considered low risk, and was being cared for under the birth centre at hospital.

My experience started with a call to the midwife team as I was concerned about a 'pop' I felt. I was dismissed by the midwife with little more than a 1 minute conversation. The following morning I woke to a rush of fluid, I was advised to come in. In hospital I was placed in a room on a monitor with all unknown practitioners. After over 2 hours of being left with people only returning to perform another vaginal exam or read the monitor with little interaction with myself I was told I must have wet myself. I was again dismissed when I stated that it was not urine as it came from my vagina not my urethra, and reassured that a lot of pregnancy women experience incontinence.

The following day I had started contracting and had reduced movement. I requested monitoring however was told I would need to attend a different hospital. Here I was again out in a room with monitors. When I pointed out my baby's heart rate was 30BPM higher than she had even been I was dismissed as this was still 'close to normal' and told I was young fit and healthy, therefore had nothing to worry about. This is a sentiment I heard many times through my labour. I was eventually discharged despite my baby's heart rate reaching 170, when her normal rate had been 130-135.

That night I went into labour. After approx 4 hrs of labour I called the hospital needing reassurance. The midwife on the other end told me that the birth centre was shut but that I 'shouldn't worry, there's no way that baby's coming in the next 8 hours' before she hung up. Due to the high HR seen that day and a general gut feeling that something was wrong I chose to present to hospital after another 2-3 hours, however after the phone call I no longer felt comfortable going to my designated hospital, and I chose to go to hospital where I had been earlier that day.

Upon arriving I was placed in an assessment room, attached to monitors and told to stay lying flat on a narrow plinth. This is agony for someone in labour. There were bright lights, no privacy and no communication. I was told I would be sent home, before another midwife told me I was going to be admitted.

I continued to labour, however was told I must have the continuous monitor attached, and was told off by a midwife when the monitors slipped off my belly as I was moving. In the next few hours I was subject to multiple VEs and interventions which were not fully explained to me. During some of the VEs the OB would continue through a contraction despite my agony. I was provided with nothing to make my labour more comfortable such as a mat for me to kneel on, and constantly told to get back on the bed despite wanting to move.

Eventually it was decided I needed a c section, where they found that my daughter was firmly wedged in my pelvis in a posterior, deflexed position. Her APGAR was 2

After watching her be resuscitated for 15 minutes I was briefly given her to hold before the midwife took her off me and took my husband and her from the room with no explanation.

I was finally reunited with my baby however my story unfortunately does not end there.

At 2 days pp I noticed my stomach was more swollen again. This was dismissed once bladder concerns were ruled out. On day 5 I reported that my incision felt like it was on fire constantly. I was told this was normal. On day 7 I called the hospital with a fever and a burning incision, I was told to see my GP. When I saw my GP I was told to go to emergency as I clearly had an infection.

I was finally admitted however did not see a consultant for the 3 nights I was there. There was no explanation of the issue. On day 4 I was discharged despite my temperature still being elevated with paracetamol on board- a clear sign of infection. I represented less than 2 hrs later vomiting and shivering. I asked for a bed but was told by the NUM that I would not be given one. I asked for somewhere safe to breastfeed my baby as I felt like I was about to pass out and was directed to a narrow chair with no support to help me with the weight of my baby.

After finally seeing a consultant OB I was readmitted. For the next few days I underwent numerous tests, however was constantly ignored regarding 2 symptoms- these ended up being the key to finding the cause of the infection and the abscess making me so ill

Once the abscess was found I was told a drain would be inserted under 'twilight', however again they dismissed me when I reported my weight and gave me a dose suited to someone 10kg smaller, meaning I was very much awake as they inserted a 1cm wide circular drain through my abdominal wall. This is the most painful thing I have ever experienced.

This drain did not work and I was then rushed to emergency surgery as I was starting to show signs of sepsis. At this point I thought that I would certainly die.

Thankfully I was OK (physically) following the surgery

What would have made my experience significantly better would have been

- having a known midwife to speak to throughout my pregnancy
- having clinicians trust that I know what is happening in my body and what is normal
- not having my concerns dismissed (as I was previously low risk) constantly from pre birth the weeks following.

I am now 8 months pregnant with my 2nd. I was not able to go onto the MGP program as I am 'complex' given my mental health issues, hence was assigned to the complex care team. However, this means that although I see the same midwife through my pregnancy I will have an unknown midwife at the birth as this team does not work on call.

This has added significant anxiety, which I have only been able to ease by paying for a private doula to be my known support person. I don't feel like this should have been my only choice.

I have also spent a considerable amount of time and money seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist to get me to the point I could even mentally deal with being pregnant again.

I also know that I am not alone, friends have been injected with sedatives against their will during labour, been bullied and coerced into interventions, and told outright lies through their pregnancy. This needs to change