

**Submission
No 1443**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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My first pregnancy was under the MGP program I believe where a midwife followed us through pregnancy it couldn't be guaranteed at the birth. She was on holidays when I went into labour.

My waters broke spontaneously at home and were followed by regular contractions. I presented to the hospital and it was confirmed that it was my waters but I was only 2 dilated so could return home and represent after 18 hours because of my broken waters.

I had irregular contractions after that point that intensified when I laid down to rest but were okay when I was walking around. Upon returning to the hospital that evening my husband was sent home and I was left to labour by myself unsupported on the ward.

After complaining about the contractions hurting a lot, the midwife said I was making a fair bit of noise so she decided she would check and see how far dilated I was- I was 5cm so she told me to call my husband back just 1 hour after sending him home (we live 20 minutes away).

He returned and I was moved to the birthing suites.

I laboured for hours supported by my husband, mother and sister. I wasn't contracting at regular intervals so they put me in an induction drip- over the course of my birth it was increased as high as it would go. I believe at this time the support of a doula or well known midwife would have made all the difference

I got out of the bath too early and my body started to not cope with the pain. At this point again it would have been helpful to be shown some non medical pain relief options. Around this point shift change happened and my lovely midwife that I had gotten comfortable with had to go home. My blood pressure increased and my sister along with the midwife encouraged me to have an epidural despite not wanting one.

I agreed and the epidural was given.

I continued to labour pain free rarely knowing when I was contracting.

Eventually I was 10cm and began pushing.

I had a 4.44 kg baby on board and had a lot of pressure and reflux happening. I really wanted to have a sip of coke so that I could simply burp to relieve the discomfort but was told I should be nil by mouth "just in case"- a phrase I have come to despise because it plants those seeds of doubt in a mothers mind that we can't do it.

I pushed unsuccessfully for around 2.5hrs. I was unaware that the epidural could be turned down and nobody even mentioned it as an option. I would have really really loved this option!

After unsuccessfully pushing the obstetrician came in and said he would have to give me some help because I had been pushing for so long. At this point I had also been in labour for about 41 hours so I was very tired.

He performs an episiotomy and pulled by big baby out with forceps. I quickly lost 2 litres of blood at this point and I believe a code was called.

After stitching me up and stopping the bleeding I tried to breastfeed my baby. The attachment was poor and I had cords and drips hanging out of me all the over the place so it was a struggle.

At some point I was given an injection for my placenta but was never told what it was or what it was for. I was also still on the drop to make my uterus contract to help stop the bleeding.

After an hour or so they tried to get me up for a shower but my BP dropped because of the blood loss and I was close to fainting. I was white as a ghost and my husband thought I might die which was obviously pretty traumatic for him.

The birth stayed with me for many many years but thanks for processing this trauma I am able to write this submission without crying.

Post birth on the ward my baby was in the ridiculous bassinets that are 1000 years old! I had a catheter in, couldn't walk and most importantly I couldn't reach my baby! At one point he was choking on mucous and I had to yell out and pray that a nurse would hear me so she could help me pick him up and stop him choking. This happened twice.

I strongly believe in co-sleeping and all its benefits which I know isn't a viable option in the hospital setting but at the very least the bassinets should be accessible for incapacitated mothers following birth- this is a big issue for cesarean mothers too.

At one point I had to call the nurse to help me change the baby because he had done a poo. I was basically told I should be doing it myself. After I explained that I literally wasn't able to because I couldn't move the midwife changed his nappy for me.

The fact that we birth a baby and then are expected to send our partners home and then you have to look after that new born baby alone is absolutely crazy! Your partner should be allowed with you from go to woe.

I've written a poem to help me process this birth- attached.

Over the next few years I have myself time to heal as much as I could and sought professional help also.

My second birth was informed. I went through a private obstetrician because something funny came up in my early blood work. I had extra scans and extra bloods which were completely unnecessary in the end but I did like seeing the baby.

My second birth was during Covid lockdowns. I was terrified to be forced to birth without my husband and was strongly considering birthing unsupported if I had to because I knew I needed my husband there to support me. We both had no signs of being unwell (I had no concerns about Covid, I was just concerned about birthing unsupported).

When I was at the point of transition we went to the hospital. I didn't want any vaginal checks but I did want to hop in the bath which I was told was not possible without a check- I agreed and was 6cm.

I got in the bath and had a Covid swab performed while I was in labour and contracting- how ridiculous! Try having a Covid swab whilst riding a contraction. Not pleasant!

At 6:50 am just 20 minutes after arriving at the hospital I was starting to push. I asked my midwife if I should be pushing? She asked me if I felt what it was like to push with my first and I told her I hadn't because of the epi. She told me I wasn't ready to push yet- I remember her asking those questions in a patronising way like I hadn't experienced 'real' birth before.

I remember looking at the clock and thinking shift change is at 7am. I asked the midwife if she finishes at 7 which she responded happily that she did. I remember thinking in that moment 'that's why you don't want me to push because your about to finish and it's more paperwork for you'.

5 minutes later a new midwife came in and introduced herself to me. She was lovely. I said to her "I'm pushing, should I be pushing yet?"

The midwife responded with yeah your probably about to have a baby'. I couldn't believe that would be the case as the other midwife had already down those seeds of doubt in my mind about my knowledge of my own body with just one simple sentence.

I said no the other midwife said I was only 6cm and that was only half an hour ago.

I continued to push- it was crazy that I couldn't turn it off! My body knew exactly what to do!

We moved to the shower as we weren't allowed to birth in the bath and within 20 minutes of pushing a beautiful baby boy and was supported to pick him up myself!

I had told my obstetrician I wanted a physiological 3rd stage which was argued about because of my previous bleed. The midwife was completely respectful and gave my body a chance to stop bleeding on its own. Unfortunately it didn't stop and my baby wasn't ready to latch yet which would have helped clamp my uterus so I started losing blood. I lost 1ltr this time.

I agreed to start the drop if it was needed but I felt okay about that decision because I knew I had made the choice myself and had given my body a chance to contract itself.

I truly believe that being well informed for my second birth made all the difference. I listened to podcasts, did a hypnobirthing course and listened to lots and lots of birth stories.

My second birth was beautiful despite it not going 100% to plan.

I would love to see this enquiry bring some more recognition to birth trauma and its effects. I would love to see women and their incredible bodies and their ability acknowledged and trusted. I would love to see doulas and homebirths and continuity of care at the forefront of all births and pregnancies. What a difference it makes to feel supported!

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story. I'm sure there's so much more to say but that's all I can think of in this moment.