

Submission  
No 1445

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I am one of many women left injured from a birth within our public hospital system that could of most likely been avoided had I been listened to, advocated for and offered appropriate care during and after birth.

I had my first baby at \_\_\_\_\_ public hospital in 2021, the experience has left me with a deep mistrust in our health system, PTSD and a chronic pain condition that has left me debilitated and a shell of the person I was before. The prolonged labour with a baby pushing on my pelvic nerves has resulted in permanent injury, that has affected my marriage, sex life, ability to parent and financially with my inability to return to work. It has affected my identity, my mental health, my physical capabilities, and the places that I can go unassisted with my child. Almost every part of my life has been impacted by what I believe to be an entirely preventable injury.

I wasn't given direction to assist my babies posterior position that was causing us both distress or offered appropriate care and support. All this trauma could have been avoided if I had been given a Caesarean when I requested it.

#### Labour experience

My contractions started at 5 am, I managed them comfortably at home until about 11pm when my Baby began to push upon my spine, sending intense nerve pain through my back. Struggling to keep my footing, walk or breath through the contractions, we headed to the hospital.

Upon my arrival at the hospital, I was met by a midwife who was instantly cold and failed to introduce herself. I was shown an assessment room where I was assessed as 4cm dilated and then left for many hours to pace the entry way at the front desk and hold the railing as the spinal pain affected my legs badly with each contraction. I was told a birthing room was not cleaned and available to me, I wasn't offered any pain relief until my husband advocated for me and went to find a staff member only then I was provided Gas in a little bottle that ran out on a few occasions. At one point I became increasingly sure that they had forgotten about me after being left in the front foyer / assessment room for about 4 hours with no support offered or communication as to when a room would be available to me. In severe pain with the gas tank running out yet again, I yelled to my husband in desperation that 'they have forgotten about me!'. Only then did my midwife re appear and offer a birth room to us at last.

Once in the room I was offered and used a Hot bath and thought surely now I will get the help and directional advice from a midwife to help me with my positioning to assist me in getting my baby off my spine.

I was offered an epidural and told that her other patients were in their rooms sleeping through after having one. I explained that I didn't want one, that it was written in my birth plan to avoid an epidural due to my past illness with a nerve condition that effected my arms and legs. After I declined the epidural, she left instantly with minimal communication and flat affect.

I didn't want to make a fuss, I did my utmost best to keep calm, in what was becoming an increasingly distressing experience. I didn't feel that my midwife was there to help me in anyway, I truly believe that she was annoyed that I did not want an epidural and to be 'sleeping through' labour like her other patients. The impression was clear that she wanted an easy night on her shift and wasn't available to accommodate anything other than an epidural.

After a few more hours in the Tub, twisting and writhing in pain (erratically like a cat that has been run over), my baby was still on my spine and causing an excruciating amount of pain to my nerves in my back, there was no sign of assistance from the medical team or advice on positions to help alleviate the spinal pain. Again, I was left alone with my husband, with neither of us knowing what was going on being our first baby and first experience in a birthing unit.

I knew something wasn't right in that I wasn't progressing and that my baby couldn't get off my spine. I was exhausted and believed I couldn't get through an active labour in my current state of fatigue, I had been awake with contractions for 22 hours. At that point I requested a Caesarean (as written in my birth plan) as I couldn't go on a moment longer with the nerve pain I was experiencing, if there had been a quick way to kill myself and end my agony in that moment I honestly would have.

I have never felt more defeated in my life, powerless, helpless and at the mercy of a midwife who had shown such little care.

I was refused a Caesarean (told by her that the doctor on that night might be needed by someone else and can't be taken up by me having a Caesarean). I again was offered an epidural, I felt coerced and pressured. Nothing was offered by this midwife except for her repeatedly suggesting an epidural. Selling it as the answer to my problems and that I could sleep like all her other patients. Defeated and realising that help was not coming, I reluctantly agreed to her epidural as my only way out.

The Anaesthesiologist was kind to me, and I distinctly remember him questioning her right after he injected me, I asked him in a moment of desperation for a Caesarean in the hope that he could advocate for me in a way that the midwife wouldn't. He asked her pointedly why he gave an epidural if I was to have a Caesarean.

After that I can only recall my disassociated mental state. I lay on the bed still feeling my sacrum spine pushing continually with the pressure from my baby's head, but the pain had ceased. I lay in the foetal position for many hours, unmoving, eyes glazed and in shock. Help was not coming; my midwife was not there to support me or assist in my birth plan or birth in any way.

Finally, a new midwife entered the room for shift change over, she introduced herself straight away and was warm, she actually looked at me like I was a human being. My level of care changed from then on, She worked alongside the first midwife to check my progress and my baby's heart by attaching a Fetal scalp electrode. My baby's heart rate was high. Shortly after that other new staff, including a new Dr appeared with the change of shift in the morning.

I asked again for a Caesarean and this time the new Dr agreed. 'You want a Caesarean? Give her a Caesarean'. Like it was such a simple request. Finally, I felt heard and seen.

The Theatre team were amazing, they were kind, they checked in with me, they looked me in the eyes when they spoke (something so simple but that meant everything to me in that moment).

My baby was born via emergency Caesarean at 9am, he was thankfully healthy, and the Theatre team gave me renewed faith in the medical team at the hospital.

Unfortunately, that renewed faith was short lived.

Bladder injury

After my catheter was removed, I don't recall being prompted to urinate by the midwives. The result was a sudden intense sharp pain in my lower abdomen, I was unable to walk from the pain but thankfully a midwife and my husband helped me get to a toilet upon her suggestion. And the pain left upon urination.

I had no feeling in my bladder (while there I measured more than 800ml, 900ml and 1000ml of urine, normal range would be roughly 350-400ml) but was assured that it would return in time and to 'time void' until then to stop my bladder being stretched by large volumes.

I was discharged from hospital with a quick chat about time voiding from a physio and given a printout on voiding urine. (In hindsight a urine catcher would have been so helpful to be sent home with to monitor the volumes and keep a voiding diary). Instead, I was advised to urinate every 2 hours even setting an alarm to get up during the night to void, which along with the sleep deprivation of a sleepless baby was very detrimental to my sleep and mental health.

### Breastfeeding issues

My baby was sent home with me unable to effectively breast feed despite my determination and request for guidance from almost every nurse on the ward (they often explained kindly that they wish they had the time to help but they were understaffed) he was later found at a GP check in 1 week postpartum to remove Caesarean stitches, that he had a severely restricted tongue that was limiting his ability to feed and causing me great nipple trauma and pain and him great weight loss. This was missed by the hospital paediatrician despite it being very visually obvious and also missed by the many nurses who I requested breast feeding assistance from.

I managed financially to have it assessed by a IBCLC privately and have it released by a private specialist clinic, saving my breastfeeding journey.

### Physiotherapy experience

I saw the hospital physio for one phone appointment (Covid times but completely useless to be assessed over the phone) and then for 1 or 2 in person appointments where I brought up the severe sacrum pain I had experienced since birth that affected my ability to sit and stand and even pick up my baby and also the continued loss of bladder function. I was given a few basic exercises and then told that 'They had been told they had to cut the books' and not see me anymore. I was shocked and felt completely fobbed off.

Over the next 5 months post-partum I was medically ignored and lost my faith in hospital. During that time my unrelenting spine pain didn't improve, I still couldn't pick up my baby from the ground at 5 months postpartum despite being very fit and healthy before the birth.

### Gynaecologist follow up

I waited 18 months post-partum for the hospital to contact me for an appointment with a Gyno. They were most unhelpful and seemed more interested in stating that the Caesarean was straightforward and not to blame for my health issues post birth, not something that I even said to the gyno, so I was confused by the defensive behaviour right out of the gate. My husband was taken aback by her manner towards us, as we had high hopes for help after waiting so long. One medication

was offered to help relax my pelvic floor but nothing further, nor referrals to someone who could help me like a Pelvic floor physio (which I have since found out they have), or a Neurologist.

### Present day

Currently at 2 years post-partum, I am now under the care of a urogynecologist and a Pelvic pain management specialist in Sydney, I have started to just recently receive help for my chronic pelvic pain and have tests to assess my bladder and why I have lost all sensation.

I went into \_\_\_\_\_ hospital, fit and active. I knew exactly what I wanted, and it was conveyed in my birth plan, but they didn't listen till the baby was in distress with a high heart rate.

As a result, I am left with a chronic pelvic pain condition (prudential neuralgia), nerve damage to my bladder (no sensation at all and still time voiding), greatly reduced sensation to my vagina and clitoris which has taken away my ability to orgasm and feel sexual pleasure. This has negatively affected my marriage greatly and impacted my mental health severely. I have too much trauma to have another baby as much as I would have loved and had planned to have a sibling for my child.

I have chronic sacrum pain that has prevented me from squatting, bending down, sitting down on a chair and any movement that causes impact like jumping or running. This has severely affected my ability to take care of my child and myself. From using the toilet to putting on my shoes, to bending to pick up my child or go places with him where I cannot sit down due to pain or run after him if needed to keep him safe. I can't even sit down at a table and have a meal with my family. I cannot stress enough the toll this injury has taken on me, my family and others who once depended on me.

As a result of this injury, I am unable to return to work due to its physical nature. This has cost me and my family financially.

My entire life has been affected by the trauma my sacrum and pelvic nerves suffered during a long posterior labour.

If I had been listened to by the medical team at \_\_\_\_\_ hospital I wouldn't live minute by minute, hour by hour with nerve pain and limited mobility. I have been let down by that hospital at every stage of the journey.

I am still praying for the day that I can live pain free and enjoy parenthood with less physical limitations.

### Recommendations:

-Better staffing ratios for both birthing ward and maternity ward (one night there was one midwife on the entire maternity ward who apologetically explained that's why she couldn't help me when I was post Caesarean and struggling with getting in and out of bed to my baby).

-Patient empowerment and our informed choices and requests respected.

-Improved education on consent/and coercion.

-Access to Pelvic floor Physiotherapy checks in the early postpartum.

-Tongue /oral restriction and feeding issues to be looked for during Paediatrician health check before discharge.

- Actual time and staffing to assist breast feeding mothers, particularly new ones. There is so much talk around supporting breastfeeding mothers, but no actual support is offered in our hospitals. Access to a IBCLC would be beneficial to many mothers before discharge or in the early weeks postpartum (in my experience and amongst my peers, many health nurses lack the skills and time to support women in this).

-Pelvic pain conditions /Prudential neuralgia, to be better understood or even known of, by health professionals especially Pelvic floor Physiotherapists and Gynaecologists (the lack of awareness is disturbing) It's a silent illness that is not talked about due to shame and lack of understanding.

- Birth trauma counselling offered and funded.

-The current Postnatal depression 'checks' at health visits are weak and feel like a 'box tick' with no substance. It is only asked about very early on with no follow up support. This could be improved with continued follow up in the first 6 months postpartum and not just the early weeks when life is a blur for mothers.

I believe we deserve and can do better,

Kind regards.