

Submission
No 1404

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 12 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

On the 15 of November 2020 at 9:15am, I arrived at _____ hospital at _____ due to meconium. I was 9cm dilated. I had been checked by my Private Midwife at home, as a precaution we went to hospital.

On arrival I asked for a hands-off birth, as I had my Partner and Midwife present, and felt safe and comfortable. Throughout my contractions, I asked not to be disturbed and we got interrupted every five minutes with a Dr wanting to put on monitors, do vaginal checks, ultrasounds. I refused all procedures as I was at a physiological 3rd stage showing signs by my midwife that were of no concern. While I waited for my body to do what it could do, I was happy to have the Pediatrician waiting outside, to check on the baby once born.

So unfortunately, they did not like me having the room with a trained professional Midwife, so the DR interrupted and said, "I will give you peace if you let us put on a trace". We asked for some time, despite my request, a minute later I was still getting pressure and I declined. They continued to walk in and out of the birthing room, asking me to put on monitors. I felt unsafe now, interrupted during contractions.

So, they called in the Head DR. wanting to speak to me while I am having my contractions. The Head Doctor said " What do you think happens to babies before midwives and obstetricians, what do you think happens, if babies get stuck, do you think they are alive or still born. What do you think happens to people in Africa ".

I had another contraction and the head Dr continued asking "in the olden days, what do you think happens to babies who get stuck after long labors". I couldn't believe what I was hearing, in my moment, I had a head doctor telling me about stillbirths and third world countries. It was only 11:45am, If I was left alone, I would have been out of there by now.

My partner was in tears and Head DR sternly said, "the baby is not coming out" and continued to talk to me during contractions recommending Caesarean section because a Vaginal examination hasn't been attached since I have arrived. Head Dr then said "So, if you let me do a Vaginal Examination maybe you will have another option."

We felt that the head Dr intentionally came to frighten us. Before I agreed to a VE, my midwife asked me to feel for myself and I did. I felt my baby's head. Giving me reassurance that my body was doing its thing and nothing like the Doctor made me feel like. Even though we told Head Dr that I felt my baby, she still had to do her own VE, I was fully dilated and told me to now push out the baby. Then she offered the Vacuum, but I declined.

Head Dr said the heart rate of the baby is reassuring but now they are worried about meconium. I felt like I had no control over the birth of my child by that point, I had to push under her instructions and not what I felt, and she continued to offer the vacuum, even though I already did decline. I wanted to try, moving on all fours but felt hurried throughout my whole experience. Head Dr did not have time for a cord delay, and she also injected syntocinon before I could decline it. Due to the force pushing, I teared, so I was asking questions to the Head Dr about it before she stitched me up, she rolled her eyes and said, " If I don't do it now, I will not do it at all". I felt belittled, she treated me like I was a child.

We did write to the _____ Hospital, I got no apology, no checkup. I got an email stating that they " interpret the staff as being concerned and trying to convey their concerns and appropriately inform (me) of the clinical picture and risk to the baby. (Me) absolutely had a right to decline treatment but as per NSW health policy we are obligated to escalate to senior clinicians when there are concerns or a deteriorating patient."

I felt like the interruptions, the words, the coercive violence were not conveying concern or duty of care at all. There were no major concerns or a deteriorating patient to be obliged to escalate to a senior clinician, who I felt was very bitter and a very old school mentality and so disconnected with what she did for birthing women. I felt like my cultural background might have had something to do with it and she discriminated against me, my culture, my Partner and my midwife because she was a homebirth professional.

We decided not to pursue any further, our lawyer mentioned that hospitals have a 6-month expiry to take complaints seriously. So, we had to think whether the first few months of holding our baby was worth the stress and trauma dealing with a hospital that did not even acknowledge and apologize for their coercive violation and aggressive bullying behavior.

The Doctors were coercive, and I had a right to decline treatment without the threat of having a senior clinician to play "the dead baby card" while a first-time mother is at a prime stage of birthing a very healthy baby. We are given hospitals to feel safe and unfortunately, my experience has moved me away from hospitals in general and now with my second pregnancy, my decisions are staying far away from any hospital due to this traumatic experience. My Partner has trauma too, it was such an awful experience, and he could not believe that in this day in age in Australia, in NSW we are still treating first time parents like this and using such language.

I am so grateful I invested in a private midwife because I feel that she was my voice and advocate during this whole ordeal, and it made me more positive to know that I spoke up for myself as much as I did. Plus, the care I received from my private Midwife postpartum was unbelievable, it made me feel secure and proud of what I achieved. I can only imagine the worst possible outcome if I did not have my midwife present.

This trauma needs to stop, birthing women are voiceless in this system. It's unnecessary trauma that could have been avoided and the system failed me.