

Submission
No 1359

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I work as a midwife in NSW in a public hospital. Every single day I see birth trauma unfold. I attribute much of this trauma to obstetric intervention, apathetic and broken care providers and limited knowledge of birth amongst women and families. Australia wide obstetric intervention is growing at an alarming rate with a one size fits all approach and no framework of psychological safety for women and families, their individual wants and needs are not taken into account but rather they are churned through a system that treats them as a number and a bed to clear for the next number to come along. Women are scared and coerced into accepting intervention, they are told that their baby will die if they do not accept intervention. This advice is not evidence based nor woman focused. Australia wide we are haemorrhaging midwives, it is an aging workforce and we are losing so much experience and knowledge every year. Maternity and labour wards are run by new grads and students and midwives with only a few years experience, we hold the title of midwives but truly we are obstetric nurses, handmaidens doing the doctors bidding. There is little to no respect for true midwifery skills. A true midwife believes women can and will give birth with little medical assistance. This is paradoxical to a system which tells women their bodies have failed them, that they cannot be safe in birth if they are at home without doctors available, that they would've died if they hadn't had a caesarean at that point, that their baby would've died if they hadn't had that induction. The system is warped and is against women and birthing parents. I have witnessed a woman screaming in pain as her baby was ripped from her body with forceps, she howled in agony and begged for help. No help was given, the pulling did not relent. I will forever be ashamed that I did not speak up. She lost consciousness afterwards. She could not walk for three days afterwards. She couldn't bond with her baby afterwards. I think about her all the time. Apathetic caregivers walk away from these women and never have to face them again. The baby is out the doctor said, I can go to sleep now. These are the people who are supposed to keep us safe when needed but they are harming and scarring women Australia wide. Violence against women is prevalent in our society and this extends into the birth space - it seems that at times a woman is treated merely as a vessel without rights, her purpose being to birth a baby and the priority being the babies safety. It does not matter what harm befalls her in the process as long as the baby is healthy. She walks out of the hospital with a healthy baby, but her inner world and her future are so often irreparably damaged by her experience. She will tell herself thereafter that it is ok, her baby is here and is worth it. She will be told to move on, birth is hard, it's not supposed to be easy. She constantly told her suffering is not valid, that she doesn't matter. She is not safe. It is heartbreaking to work as a midwife and see this unfold so regularly. Each day I try to make a small difference, be a small moment of kindness in a woman's experience, help her to feel safe and loved and respected - everything that the system fails to bring.

We need more midwives - they exist, they are registered and out there but there are no incentives for them to come to work in this environment of violence and intervention. Their knowledge and physiological approach to birth needs to be respected. We need better pay, bottom line - we work in a specialised model and everyday provide life changing care. We need higher pay.

We need more continuity of care models - this is proven to provide safer outcomes for women and babies and greater staff retention.

We need staff-patient ratios mandated across Australia. This essential in providing safe care for women and creating a psychologically safe environment for women.