

Submission  
No 1448

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

My experience of birth trauma began well before entering the birthing suite. My private obstetrician came recommended but I felt disempowered in any decision-making about my birth experience. My wishes for a birth plan were never discussed and the obstetrician made all decisions in a rushed manner. At the time, I was very open-minded and put all my trust in the obstetrician. It should be noted that I was open to having a C-section, but whenever I tentatively brought this up, the response was negative. At one stage the obstetrician referred to the need for a C-section as 'bad karma'. When my due date came and I was still showing no signs of labour, the obstetrician literally called the hospital right then and there and booked in an induction for 10 days' time. I was not provided with any options, I was not involved in any discussions, no pros or cons were discussed, I was not consulted at all...my approach of totally trusting my obstetrician was already coming back to bite me, I just didn't know the extent of the damage at this stage.

My induction began with the invasive process of having Cervidil inserted. The following morning, I was hooked up to a number of drips (I needed antibiotics due to Group B Strep) and the cascade of intervention began. After managing the intense pain of artificial (and rapidly increasing) contractions for hours, I asked for an epidural. While this helped with the pain, I went into shock and became cold and shivery. The midwife was only in and out of the birthing suite briefly, so it was up to my husband to find extra blankets and try and warm me up. My labour kept progressing (although I look back now and realise that the epidural was probably masking the incredible torture my poor body was going through). After approximately 10 hours, it was time for me to push. I had done my own research on pushing by reading 'Birth Skills' as the antenatal class I attended was woefully inadequate. I tried to push for hours, but it became clear that my baby was stuck. At this point I should mention that I was a very fit person who had a really strong pelvic floor due to ballet and horseriding...my physical ability to give birth naturally was never assessed prior to labour.

The obstetrician came into the birthing suite after approx 2 hours of me trying to push. With a very short, confident speech about using the right instruments for the right scenario and her extensive experience, she recommended that she use forceps to assist delivery. She said she did all her training with forceps and it was very safe when done properly. No negative side-effects were discussed at all. Again, no other options were discussed...to this day, I still don't know if it may have been possible for me to have a C-section at this point. So again, by trusting the obstetrician, I was disempowered. After an episiotomy and forceps delivery, my beautiful baby was born.

I was, and still am, completely grateful for the safe delivery of my precious baby. However, I sometimes wonder if the same outcome could have been achieved in a far less traumatic way.

Fast forward 4 years and the true extent of my physical and psychological birth trauma has presented itself. I have been diagnosed with Stage 4 pelvic organ prolapse. This affects every aspect of my life - both physically and psychologically. As soon as I was diagnosed, I became extremely anxious and depressed and needed to seek the help of my GP to begin medication and psychological therapy to help me through a really difficult time. Pelvic organ prolapse (POP) is a traumatic injury to sustain, and I am reminded of it every single step I take. I am only young, but this is an injury I will be dealing with for the rest of my life. Treating POP is also costing me a great deal of money-putting financial strain on my family. I am learning how common it is, with some research suggesting 1 in 2 women experience POP...a truly silent pandemic.

I hope future generations of women experience the following on their birth journey:

- A compulsory antenatal questionnaire/discussion with an obstetrician/midwife that covers the woman's preferences for birth. It should discuss common scenarios in birth and highlight the options available and the pros and cons of each option. It should be presented in a non-judgemental way and should empower the individual.
- Compulsory, fully-funded perinatal appointments with a women's health physio who can assess a woman's pelvic floor and recommend a birth plan that suits each woman's unique physiology.
- Normalising C-Section. The arbitrary goals placed on hospitals to achieve a certain rate of vaginal births are playing a huge role in the high incidence of birth trauma. Get rid of these systemic practices that disempower individuals. Every birth should be treated as a case-by-case basis. C-sections are absolutely the best option for many women - our society and systems need to stop demonising them.
- A team approach to the perinatal period...doulas, psychologists, physios, dieticians etc...with the individual at the front and centre of decision making.