

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Organisation: Hygieia Health Ltd

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Partially
Confidential

Hi there, we are submitting this experience of birth trauma on behalf of . She is happy to be named and for her story to be public. Her experienced happened at Hospital. From here on in , these are her words:

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to share my personal experiences and perspectives on behalf of women who have encountered birth trauma. As a woman who has personally experienced birth trauma I hope to shed light on the impact it can have on individuals and families.

I, , have experienced birth trauma firsthand. The specifics of my own encounter with birth trauma are as follows:

I had a bleed at 38 weeks and had a scan that showed his position (posterior), sizing (big) and that he had a cord wrapped around his neck twice. But they didn't communicate any if this until much later (I was told well after my birth that this should have communicated).

About 41 weeks, I went in for stretch and sweep and at this point asked for a caesarean. And was denied.

During the birth, the first major thing was that I presented twice in labour and sent home, it was timing of contractions, and then another excuse but it was actually that they were understaffed. When I did finally get admitted into Birth Suite - it all unravelled. There was a rapid decline with my baby's heart rate with each contraction and his heart rate would be so quiet or not able to be heard. At one point, they placed an internal clip on him (Electronic Fetal Scalp Electrode). The midwife in my suite was really distressed and was calling for help and she went out into the hallway and (my husband and I) could hear her ask for help and from the room we could hear the hallway discussions: she was told to go away and deal with it herself as she was a professional and they were too busy. This happened multiple times.

I also waited a really long time for an epidural (due to anesthetist being too busy). Further into the labour, with contractions getting quicker and worse it became an emergency. The midwife went to get help and said she believes it's an emergency situation and this time she wasn't going to take no for an answer. She came back in quite distraught (having again been told no). It wasn't until I was pushing and she had raised the emergency alarm from the room. I could hear arguments in the hallway again and we could hear that if we were wheeled down the hall (for caesarean) that I wouldn't make it, and the other side of the argument that if the baby wasn't delivered he would die. So as you can imagine I was very distressed hearing all of this and trying to birth. Within minutes there were 6 or more people standing at the end of my bed arguing and I was told I needed to push, and we were both in an emergency situation and I had to get the baby out right now. From there someone did 3 suction cap pulls which

kept popping off. From there, forceps were used. First pull of the forceps - one of the people pulling had her legs in the stirrups while someone bear hugged her and had them both pulling together. There was so much force with that pull that when they slipped and the forceps slipped, they flew back behind those two people and put a hole in the wall.

From there I was given an episiotomy and during the cut the Obstetrician said 'oh fuck' and it turned out she had slipped and sliced part of my leg. I just closed my eyes and held my breath because I could see everyone's faces in the room and the look on their faces was that we were all going to die. I just pushed as hard as I could and he was born with meconium all over him and had ingested it. He was given to me and when I saw him I saw how beaten and bruised he was.

From here my care was absolutely disgusting. After a couple of hours, I was wheeled into an isolation room because I had a history of MRSA. Again I could hear the arguments in the hall. I could hear them saying that the baby was fine and I had no reason to be in a room on my own and I should be moved. I was then placed into a room with 4 other mums. Within those couple of hours, I noticed that my baby was really unwell and really unsettled. I kept calling for help and they told me this was life now and I'd have to learn to juggle him.

It then got to later in the evening and one of the nurses came in and took him from me because he was so unsettled. I fell asleep and when I woke up he was in special care without anyone informing me or getting my consent. He spent 7 days in the special care nursery on drips with infections and illness and subsequently spent the first 8 months of his life on reflux medication from a pediatrician because of the damage it had done.

After he was taken to the special care nursery and I woke up and saw he wasn't with me, I was worried and went up there and as they were placing a cannula in him (without informing me or getting my consent) I was told I had to wait outside and couldn't see him.

They kept trying to discharge me without him despite that I kept telling them I had pain and there was something wrong with my stitches. It took them 2-3 days to actually check and in those days I was told nothing was wrong and to just sit on an ice block (when in fact there was something wrong, I had a stage 4 prolapse). 3 days later the midwife I had in my birth that had tried to get help came to see me and she said she had had to take 3 days off work to recover from her own experience because she'd never been through anything like that.

They came in one evening and told me there was a room that was closer to the special care nursery seeing as I wouldn't discharge myself. I agreed without knowing what I was expecting. And at 1am I was taken with a torch and a sheet to a rehab room that was for women drug problems who were there to visit their babies. I was a dorm style room and everyone in there was a chronic user with addiction problems. I refused to stay in that room and when I wouldn't go in there, they told me by agreeing to go to that room I'd effectively discharged myself from

the ward, so they wouldn't put me back into my previous room. I needed to get my mum to come and support me with arguing about this and after a bit of a fight I went back to my original room and from there the care was horrendous, I would wait hours and hours for pain relief and I was treated like I was a problem, like I was in the way and a burden on them.. That was pretty much the stay in . And that was my birth.

The effects of this have been long lasting. My son is 6 and I am still getting mental health support now, 6 years later and I am still medicated on a double dose for anxiety and depression.

My son has had significant bowel issues and has been in and out of pediatric care and his milestones have been a bit delayed. I definitely suffered from some detachment from him and our relationship suffered. We battled this experience legally for 5 years, for malpractice and medical negligence and no matter which way we turned what angle we took the hospital has always been too big and powerful - records have gone missing or things have been redacted. We had to withdraw last year, and I felt like I was pressured into withdrawing my claim. Because if the hospital won I'd be sued for defamation and certainly didn't have the funds for doing that and for me it was never about winning any money, I wanted to make sure no other woman had to go through what I went through.

The fact of the hospital doctors and medical team saying "you're alive, and so is your son you should be grateful". Yes, I am grateful to be alive and thankful that my son is here, but it is certainly not the life and the repercussions of actions without consent that have changed my life completely, if I had of been given the cesarian that I was denied, most or every aspect would have been avoided. I was never given a good enough reason to not be considered for a Caesarean other than it's better to have a natural baby in the words of a clinic midwife doing my prenatal checks. and begging for the cesarian to be told no, we could have avoided everything here had I had a choice.

We also asked for a debrief several times and were promised one over 3 to 5 consecutive days. The doctor was always apparently too busy or couldn't come in, and even though we were promised a debrief before discharge no one ever explained what actually happened from a medical point of view .

I also think that something helpful for Mums would be a safe space in the hospital, after going through such trauma, being put in a room with four other mums, hugging and cuddling their baby, while mine was taken away and placed in special care, tore me to shreds.

The experience I had has gone beyond that day and the trauma has gone beyond any physical trauma - it has done a lot of damage to my relationships, financial struggles, long term health concerns, challenges in my marriage and relationships with my son and friends and family. As well as my own mental health issues, physically I also have incontinence, bowel and pelvic

floor issues ... so this experience has done physical, emotional, financial, and relationship damage. It has affected every aspect of my life and in every sense of the word has life changing (in a negative way). The anxiety and trust issues I have with the system is beyond repair.

Having reflected upon my experience, I believe that several factors contributed to my birth trauma. These factors may include:

- staffing
- communication - nothing was explained to me
- medical negligence
- lack of training
- lack of support for pregnancy information/education before birth
- lack of support after birth
- lack of consent

The aftercare was probably what did more of the long lasting damage emotionally. I never felt so alone and so misunderstood and made to feel that I was exaggerating or making this up.

Drawing from my personal journey, I would like to propose specific solutions and changes to enhance maternity care in Australia, with the aim of preventing future instances of birth trauma. The following are the changes I advocate for are:

- better support and training for the staff - more staff on shift and for the staff (eg the midwife in my birth) to be treated better in their workplace
- better support for the system which was clearly under the pump
- Specialist training for when things go wrong so they know how to support us
- For more education to happen around women's rites so they are not mistreated like I was
- better education/information available for new mums
- for women and mums who experience to have someone to talk to - to let them know they are not alone.
- if there is anything financially / or medicare to support women in recovery. Not only did I have a baby, I have been forking out money to support myself through a stage 4 prolapse and had to cover this privately.

Thank you for considering my submission. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute my experiences and viewpoints to the committee's ongoing inquiry. If necessary, I am willing to provide additional evidence during a hearing to further support my perspective.

With sincere appreciation,