

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Organisation:** Hygieia Health Ltd

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Partially  
Confidential

Hi there. Please note that we are submitting this on behalf of a woman named [redacted] who would like to remain anonymous. From here on in, these are her words:

AUGUST 12 2023

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 was induced at 39.5 weeks due to reduced fetal movements. The induction began with the tape for a few hours, then the balloon catheter overnight which caused very painful contractions. The next morning my water was broken, and I was started on oxytocin.

They discovered my baby was posterior at this point, and when my contractions began properly, they were excruciating, non stop and I only felt them in my back.

After 4 hours of this, I requested an epidural as nothing else helped the pain.

After the epidural was placed by an absolutely amazing anaesthetist (he was awesome!), I could finally relax and sleep for the first time in over 24 hours.

After 4 hours, I was checked and was fully dilated. I then was coached to push on my back, even though I asked to turn over and push on my hands and knees as I could move my legs and had some feeling. The midwife denied my request as she said it was too hard with the constant monitoring I was on.

After pushing for 40 mins, my baby's heart rate started to get too high, which is when they told me I had to have forceps straight away. Everything is a big blur from here, as nothing was properly explained to me, and I felt totally out of control.

They struggled to get his head out (one doctor was squatting on the floor pulling as hard as she could) and as such they didn't wait for another contraction before delivering his body.

After he was here, thankfully he was totally fine, and crying. However as a result of the forceps and all the pulling, I had quite a bad tear. They weren't sure at first whether it was a 2nd or 3rd degree, however after closer looking they realised it was a 3C tear plus an episiotomy.

I'm really glad that they let me delay cord clamping, it was the only thing I was in the right headspace to be able to make sure happened.

It was still a blur after he was born as I was bleeding a bit more than they wanted, and they were rushing around, putting things in my drip, other injections in my leg etc all of which I didn't know what was happening or what they were doing.

After an hour, they took me to theatre, but when I got there I had to wait over an hour in the bay all alone. I wish they had let me stay with my baby until they were ready for me as I was so scared and sad and crying all alone.

Finally, they took me in, and it was a team of only men. I had been sexually abused as a child, and had requested to have females present if possible. I was quite shocked that only men were there (bar one female who was in and out the whole time) and I found it so hard. I didn't want to go under as I wanted to get back to my baby as fast as I could. But it was very difficult to be there as they didn't tell me anything that was happening and they didn't talk to me until the anaesthetist looked over and saw me crying and then came and talked to me. I just felt a bit ignored and talked over.

I feel that I was misinformed about the induction, it was encouraged and I was told it wouldn't be too painful until labour actually began. I also don't think I was properly educated as to the risks of an induction, and of how intervention is more likely. I had really wanted a natural labour, however that wasn't encouraged at all, and I feel as though I was left to figure it out myself while the midwife sat on her computer in the corner. When I had the epidural the doctor who came in to check me said that she wished all women had one as it makes it so much easier.

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

The lack of time to decide about forceps or to even have it sink in also contributed to my trauma. My baby wasn't very distressed, and taking a minute or two to try a different position pushing, or to even explain to me and my husband who was trying his best to support me what was happening would have been so nice.

Also, not being told about what they were putting in my drip and not knowing what they were doing was really difficult too.

Finally, the most traumatic thing was theatre. That night when I got back to my room and finally was reunited with my baby 4 hours later I was so disconnected with him and really really struggled. The midwife actually ended up taking my baby to the nurses station so I could sleep, but I couldn't and just was crying so much over it all.

As a result of my birth, which I believe was mismanaged a bit and wasn't ideal, I tore so badly, and I struggled a lot with everything. I still have pain from tearing, and although I do want more children, the thought does make me a bit scared.

These are just my thoughts as I have struggled with how my first birth went and still struggle.

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...I'd love to see more encouragement to birth naturally if that's what you want, and more interest in seeing birth plans (my midwives weren't interested at all).

I also think there needs to be more education on what happens about forceps, and also just it happening a bit slower so that I could take it in.

In theatre, I'd have liked to maybe have a midwife or female nurse assigned me just to sit next to me and talk. Or have my husband allowed in to hold my hand. I don't see how it's any different from a c section...

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.