

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Organisation: Hygieia Health Ltd

Date Received: 12 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

Members of the committee, we are submitting this on behalf of a mother named . She is very happy to be named and contacted. Please note that the below words are her own and it is in her words that the submission will follow.

Subject: Submission on Birth Trauma

AUGUST 10 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.

My name is and I have experienced birth trauma firsthand. The specifics of my own encounter with birth trauma are as follows:

I was at hospital and it was my work place too (I am a registered nurse). The first thing I found traumatic, is I was told the midwife needed to check how far along I was, without knowing what was actually involved in this or having it explained to me I agreed because I didn't think it sounded too invasive.. She told my partner to hold my hand and when I asked why she told us 'because this is going to hurt', and HOLY SHIT it hurt immensely - it felt like she was scraping my insides out.

After a while and my labour taking some time the midwife told me she needed to break my waters to continue the labour. Again didn't give me information about what this involved or why it was necessary - she just told me she had to do it and I put my trust in someone who knows more about birth than me. So she broke my waters with a tool. And when my waters were broken there was meconium in the waters... she then told me that because there was meconium I had no option but for a scalp clip to be attached (fetal scalp electrode). I asked if they could do intermittent monitoring or any other way and she said a flat no because it was meconium and that was the only option. So I felt I was given no choice, and again no information about this or options. I was never told I could say no. (Informed consent).

After some more time, I asked for an epidural, but I was 10cm. She said 'I can get you one but will have to lie to the anesthetist about how far you are because he won't come in here if you're 10cm' So she went and she told him I was 8cm but actually I was 10cm.

After I had the epidural and because I was 10cm she said I was at the pushing stage, and I could push now (although they didn't know the position of the baby). She never gave me any idea how to do push or any guidance which I needed when I couldn't feel anything - I pushed and pushed for an hour without any way of knowing if I was making the right parts of my body work because I couldn't feel anything. She just sat on her computer and scrolled through whatever and was not with me or supporting me. This was a locum midwife and she didn't engage with me at all.

It wasn't until another midwife came through and provided me with some more guidance and told me how to push when I couldn't feel, she actually coached me and that's when I realised I had spent an hour doing it wrong.

I then only had half hour until the Ob (also a locum) came in and told me that I had to have a caesarean.

I could hear conversations with the locum midwife and the other staff asking her if she had informed the Ob / Pediatric team about my presentation she said she didn't know she was meant to.

An Ob who I had never met came and did an internal (without consent) and a ultrasound/bedside scan. He didn't speak to me other than to do the procedure, didn't introduce himself or speak kindly to me. Then told me in a matter of fact way that my pelvis was too small and I had to have a caesarean and was not given any choice or options or other information. Now I call bullshit on that because I've done more research and educated myself and I know my pelvis was not too small.

The anesthetist topped up my epidural and when they were doing that they told me I would feel something during the caesarean but that it wouldn't be painful. But then I could feel all the shoving and scraping and pulling and it felt really uncomfortable. When I complained it was hurting, I was threatened and told to shut up or they'd put me under.

After my baby was born I was on the table for a long time and no one explained to me or my partner why I was there for so long - they were arguing over me about how much blood I had lost and I was listening to it all feeling increasingly concerned.

It wasn't until the next day they told me why I was on the table for so long and that was because during the procedure my uterus had been torn and they had to take my uterus out of my body repair it.

I was never offered a debrief. The locum Ob came in and told me about the torn uterus and told me that I was never going to be able to have a VBAC then told me he had to go and catch a plane because he was only there for a short time. I was never given any opportunity to ask questions or talk it through.

Later when a new Ob came in he asked if I'd had a debrief, and when I said no I hadn't he said he couldn't do it with me because he wasn't on shift but that all he knew was that on my file it said I could never have a VBAC no matter how many years it is between births.

And that was that

My baby is now 18m old and I am too scared to have another baby. I'm not getting any support for it because I have tried to push it all aside.

It has affected my relationship with my partner. He was so traumatised as well. The night she was born he went home because he was so shaken he couldn't stay and deal with it. We both feel if we ignore it it's not there.

Another aspect that I found traumatic was that it was also during COVID and I was only allowed one person with me. I pushed and pushed to have my mum there but was denied and I found it really hard to have my partner in there as the only support because he was not equipped to deal with it all (I don't blame him, it just wasn't his role) I felt I might have had a different experience if I were able to have 2 support people and could have had my mum.

Being rural was hard too, because I had a locum Ob and a locum midwife and they didn't know me, didn't talk to me, and then it left me with no opportunity for debrief as was on a plane.

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

lack of training on the locum midwife

poor communication between staffing re protocols

midwife was neglectful - not sure how she has a registration

lack of empathy from anesthetist - why threaten me when I'm so vulnerable instead of showing compassion?

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:

better training

more compassionate care

trauma informed care

one known care provider

continuity of care

midwives should encourage couples/partners to hire a doula

or if publicly funded doulas were available that would be great

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,