

My wife and I had a pregnancy journey that was supported by the Royal Hobart Hospital and via MGP in [REDACTED]. It was our first pregnancy that was going through to full term. The birth was a natural birth.

Our experience with the midwives was professional throughout the whole experience from start to the end of the service, and without them we would have really struggled. It felt like the training provided to our midwives gave them the skills to support us well and for us to build trust in them.

However our experience with the Doctors throughout the birth period was negative.

In preparation for our birth, we wrote our birth plan on instruction from our midwife. This was a plan we were happy with, as it aligned with our values, made us feel safe, thinking that the plan would guide any medical professionals we engaged with. It felt like a very valuable tool to give us power in an unfamiliar space (the hospital). We thought that we would have agency over my wife's body and the body of our child.

However, once in the hospital during labour, we did not feel protected or supported by our birth plan in our interactions with the Doctors. Whilst the nurses and midwives were personable, caring and attentive, the doctors were rigid, controlling and efficient, caring more about the hospital running to maximise the efficiency of their energy and resources. Our experience with the doctors was not consensual, and they didn't respect our birth plan, in fact we feel that they didn't even read the plan.

During our time in the hospital, the doctors performed a couple of invasive internal examinations that made my wife feel pain, discomfort and later led to her experiencing PTSD around her birth, which impacted our life significantly.

During this it felt like the doctors hadn't read our birth plan, and were just treating us as if my wife were a procedure to complete, rather than a person that needed to be supported and cared for.

The whole experience in the hospital has given both of us a negative perspective of having a baby in the hospital system. We hope to have a second baby, however we don't have an income that easily allows us to have a baby outside of the RHH. We want to be assured that there has been a change in the hospital system to ensure that people feel heard, respected and safe. That all medical professionals can see us as people rather than a cog in the system that must be kept moving as fast and efficiently as possible. A birth plan should be treated as a contract that all medical professionals must respect and NOT breach, unless in emergency situations.

Solutions

The recommendations that my wife and I have are:

- Easier and wider access to midwife led continuity of care models
- Access to a known midwife
- Access to publicly funded homebirth, birth centre or a birthing on country program

- Access to unbiased evidence based information
- Legislation on informed consent and rights/expectations around a birth plan
- Mandatory trauma-informed training for clinicians
- More funding for post-partum care, such as physio, social worker, lactation support
- Improved support for early pregnancy loss, birth and postpartum for all affected people