

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Reproductive, Maternal and Paediatric](#)
Subject: Birth trauma submission
Date: Monday, 16 September 2024 12:27:26 PM

[REDACTED]

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to the Select Committee on Reproductive, Maternal and Paediatric Health Services in Tasmania, because I need to share my story.

My name is [REDACTED] and I live in Hobart. I have one daughter, [REDACTED] who will be [REDACTED] in November. I would like to address the trauma and disrespectful care that I experienced in the later stages of my pregnancy, labour and post-partum care whilst under private obstetric care and delivering at HPH.

In my pregnancy, no one told me that a stretch and sweep was a form of induction and that it would in fact alter the course of my labour. No one told me that it was unusual and not best practice to do this from 37 weeks in a normal, healthy pregnancy of which we had no urge to rush the timing of our birth. I was told that this would have only positive impacts on my labour however it caused an extremely painful irritation of my uterus and my body and baby be forced into a labour that we both weren't ready for, resulting in an extremely long and painful labour and "emergency (but not)" caesarean section. I was not given enough information to make an informed decision about getting stretch and sweeps at 37, 38 and 39 weeks gestation.

In my labour, I didn't feel listened to when I rang my obstetrician's office to ask if this severe pain (post my third stretch and sweep) was normal. The receptionist came back to me and told me that my obstetrician said it was normal as she had irritated the cervix. This pain went on for Tuesday afternoon, evening, all day Wednesday until I finally had enough and went into hospital at midnight that night. I didn't know that taking pain relief and sleeping medication could stall my labour. I had no idea that I could have chosen to go home until I was more dilated. Being in that environment was causing my body to feel unsafe and my body was protecting me by stalling my labour. I felt disrespected when a midwife told me "she will want to put you on the drip, although you might be 6cm I didn't think you would be 4". I wasn't given enough information to make an informed decision about getting an epidural and how this could make mine and my babies heart rate increase and further stall my labour. I had to ask for my own birthing mat and ball and midwives only came in to do checks or to tell me things my obstetrician would do. Not one midwife nor my obstetrician told me positions I could try, things I could do to progress the labour or even to suggest a shower. This would have at least made me feel better after three days of labour and prior to having a c-section on Thursday night.

I felt scared when the decision was made to have an emergency c-section and I was devastated beyond belief that this was how my birth ended up. I was terrified of being in

that theatre and I felt so so sad to be surrounded by so many people in the bright lights who were all talking and laughing like it was a normal, regular day and not something that would alter my life forever.

I did not receive adequate support from my obstetrician after my birth and instead a random obstetrician was sent in, who I did not feel comfortable with, to do my after care. I had to ask before I got discharged from hospital 5 days later for my obstetrician to come and see me to do a debrief before I left. If I had not asked for this I would not have seen her until the six week appt. This is just not good enough. I spent those days in hospital absolutely devastated about how my birth had gone and I was deeply ashamed and heartbroken. The midwives supported me as best they could and I felt like I got really good support with breastfeeding and pain relief from the midwives who work at HPH. For this I am truly grateful. I struggled to connect with my baby and I did not want to even look at her, let alone hold her. I am lucky that my partner made an immediate and strong connection with our daughter because without this there could have been lasting impacts on our relationship and our mental health. When my daughter turned 18 months old I felt the elation and love that I should have felt 18 months prior. It took this long, and for me to pay privately for psychology sessions and external birth debriefs to work through the trauma. I also had physical trauma in the form of severe back pain and a hypertonic pelvic floor, for which I have paid for physio, chiro and emotional release work. I blame a lot of this trauma on how my late pregnancy, birth and early post-partum care went and for this there needs to be change and action to help other mothers like me.

The recommendations that 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
- Mandatory trauma-informed training for clinicians
- More funding for post-partum care, such as physio and birth trauma specialists
- Debriefs provided for all patients no matter how their birth went, and more support given for those who need it

Kind regards,

