



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT

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Jonathan Campton

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

31 January 2019

The Committee Secretary,

Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services,

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

GPO Box 1020

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Sent by email: LACommitteeHACS@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

My wife, Claire Buxton, and I are particularly concerned about the level of care offered by maternity services at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children (CHWC). In particular within your terms of reference:

- (a) Models of care for all maternity services offered at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children (CHWC);
- (c) Management of patient flow, including, but not limited to, wait lists, booking services, and capacity constraints;
- (d) Management of patient birthing preferences, including, but not limited to, professional advice offered to patients, and the practices associated with birthing emergencies; and
- (h) Patient satisfaction with the services;

Claire and I returned to Canberra from Sydney in December 2016. We made this decision because we believed Canberra was a good place to raise children, sadly we did not appreciate how risky it was to actually give birth to children in the ACT. If we had our time again we would have stayed in Sydney for the births and then considered a move to Canberra.

[REDACTED]

My wife has published her birth story on her blog

<http://lifeonwallace.com/2017/04/18/twin-breech-birth-story/>

<http://lifeonwallace.com/2017/05/16/vaginal-twin-breech-birth/>

My quick summary is that prior to this pregnancy, Claire had three healthy pregnancies and three vaginal births. The last two pregnancies had been at the RPA and we strongly supported government hospitals. Claire had a "proven pelvis" and could virginally birth kids over 4 kgs. While the fourth pregnancy was naturally conceived twins presenting breech, Claire wanted to attempt a vaginal birth in a hospital environment. As twins, both babies were likely to be small (2.2kg) and Claire very much wanted to enjoy a vaginal birth in a caring environment for what might be her last pregnancy.

Sadly the CHWC was not that caring environment. It was a world apart from our experiences at the RPA in Sydney. Claire's first appointment was with [REDACTED]. He made it clear that the doctors at CHWC had been deskilled to birthing children breach. [REDACTED] did not want Claire to attempt this and that if she did she may not have a doctor prepared to assist. Claire was left in no illusion that CHWC was offering us a deadly game of Russian roulette. She might get lucky with a doctor on the right day, but otherwise she could present in labour and no doctor would be available to birth this 'high risk pregnancy'. [REDACTED] immediately started speaking to Claire about Caesareans and "grooming" her for this procedure.

Claire was so distraught after her first visit that I accompanied her on the next visit. I was disgusted by what I witnessed. My highly educated wife was treated like some dumb idiot that lacked agency and was going to be forced to have a medical procedure regardless of her wishes. My wife, a lawyer, was almost in tears as she expressed her refusal to consent. Ignoring my wife's lack of consent, [REDACTED] made an appointment for the procedure 'just in case'. The doctor lacked experience and ethics. [REDACTED] tried to console my wife by saying Claire had nothing to fear about a caesarean and that she herself had had a caesarean. Such comments lacked understanding and showed a profound lack of knowledge given my wife actually wanted the pain of birthing two children vaginally in a breach position- any man would opt for a caesarean given the two options. It was not fear of caesareans, but a strong desire to first attempt to birth vaginally.

After this visit I made contact with Calvary John James Hospital and with the assistance of a private Canberra based obstetrician my wife gave birth to [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] February 2017. My wife had the most amazing birth experience and we were able to hold two healthy beautiful girls. Instead of recovering from a cesarian, my wife could walk back to the room and breastfeed twins sitting upright. It was sad and disappointing that the CHWC could not provide this experience, while a hospital better known for providing caesareans, supported my wife's choices for a vaginal birth so strongly. We sat uncomfortably with the hypocrisy of posters plastered over CHWC promoting vaginal births and statements by the ACT government promoting the choice of women.

My wife left the CHWC with no notice that she had gone to John James. The doctors at CHWC were pushing my wife to have an caesarean for this high risk pregnancy, yet no one ever followed up with her. At the last appointment, they could not make a furth appointment as doctors were not available. As such, Claire simply feel out of there system. [REDACTED] states taht he meet with the other

doctors to develop a care plan for Claire. If this did in fact occur, it is an indictment that CHWC went to this effort about never followed up with the patient. The systems at CHWC failed Claire. My wife could have been subjected to abuse, prevented from medical treatment, or simply dead. As no follow up appointment was made at her last appointment, she simply disappeared with no care or presumption about what occurred to the mother with a high risk pregnancy needing an immediate caesarean.

The ACT Health Minister refused to meet with us. Instead she offered a simple apology and pushed us to the department. The Department meet with us, apologised and promised to follow up. We received no follow up.

I wrote to the Minister requesting answers to the following questions in March 2017:

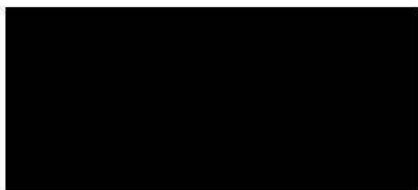
- What the ACT Government is doing to ensure that Centenary Hospital for Women and Children can guarantee women the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, in particular that they will be supported in their decision for a natural birth;
- What the ACT Government is doing to ensure doctors employed by ACT Health support the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of coercion, including the threat of withdrawing medical care;
- What the ACT Government is doing to obtain the medical care in child birth that is easily available privately in Canberra or in other states, but not at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children;
- What the ACT Government is doing to upskill doctors to promote natural birth, even high risk natural births such as breach deliveries (noting current efforts nationally like the breach delivery clinic at Westmead);
- What system changes have occurred to prevent pregnant mothers with high risk pregnancies simply falling out of the system with no follow up;
- What the ACT Government is doing to remove a culture of bullying within the doctors (not nurses) at Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, in particular:
 - Treating pregnant women as dumb and lacking choice;
 - Failing to personalise medical care and instead arrogantly adhering to protocols;
 - Continually attempting to book a patient into have a serious medical procedure without consent and against her expressed wishes;
 - Failure to adhere to Section 10(2) of the Human Rights Act, specifically to attempt to book a C-Section against the express wishes of the patient; and
 - Believing that ones own experience of a medical procedure validated it as a safe option for other women.
- What counselling or disciplinary procedures have occurred with regard to the totally inappropriate above responses of [REDACTED]; and
- What the Canberra Government is doing to support the mental health of mothers in late term pregnancy and ensure that people who have requested assistance with their mental health receive it.

After repeated letters to the Minister and the meeting with her departmental staff, we are yet to receive answers to the above questions. It appears that the Government has little interest in fixing the maternity system at CHWC.



We would be pleased if the inquiry could explore why CHWC is unable to provide the level of medical care for twin births and breach births that is common in other jurisdictions. Canberra has a high rate of twin births, yet the CHWC seems poorly equipped to deal with twins, preferring to mitigate any risk with forced or coerced caesarean births. There are a number of very sad stories about multiple births at CHWC and we thank God that we had the money to go private. Furthermore, the Inquiry might like to explore [REDACTED] own admission that the doctors at CHWC are "deskilled" for birthing babies virginally in a breech position. Canberra deserves doctors that are equipped with these basic skills to allow mothers the free choice of a vaginal birth. It is sad taht we could only get such doctors privately.

Yours sincerely

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Jonathan Campton

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