



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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To whom this may concern,

I am writing to you today to share my awful experience at the maternity unit at TCH- Canberra Hospital back on February 14th 2018. Here below is the letter of complaint I sent. I'd love to assist you in any way I can if it helps more people come forward. I did receive an apology, but it was quick and I just felt fobbed off. I honestly feel that I could never go to that hospital ever again.

To whom this may concern,

Please accept this statement as a formal complaint relating to how I was treated during my labour and delivery on 14th February 2018.

Firstly I was told my entire pregnancy that I was high risk because I was having my ninth child and that because I had a history of preterm labour and postpartum haemorrhage that they would be keeping a close eye on me.

I strongly believe that hospital failed their duty of care towards me during this time whilst I was in labour.

I was also told that as soon as my first contraction started that I was to head straight to hospital where they could keep a close eye on me. I rang the hospital and told them I was in labour around 1 am on the 14th of February. I was 38 weeks gestation. The midwife advised me to go in and get checked. Since we live an hour from the hospital we decided to load everyone into our vehicle and head to the hospital. First, we dropped our children to my mother in laws home.

We arrived at the delivery suite around 3.30am. I was internally checked a couple of times by midwives and a doctor.

I was in a lot of pain, but it was irregular and continued to be irregular the whole way through.

I was checked for dilation twice in the few hours I spent there that morning, but they had established that not much had progressed during that time. I explained to them that I have had irregular labour before right up until I have delivered my previous babies but they didn't appear concerned. At that point, I was 2cm dilated and was verbally told by a midwife I would be kept in hospital.

The doctor decided around 9.30am that I should go home. We explained to them that we didn't think this would be a good idea

because of how far we lived from the hospital and that we had other children to organize. We told them that my Mother in law was looking after our children and that we could go there but it would not have been an ideal situation.

My husband and I left the hospital and went to the local shopping centre because there was no way we were going home. I was walking around in agony for an hour or so. I felt embarrassed as I knew people were looking. We headed back to my mother in laws place but had only stopped there for twenty minutes until we decided we would go back to the hospital again as my pain had got much worst. We rang the hospital and told them we would be back in very soon.

I felt silly ringing because of how some of the midwives made me feel. I, however, was concerned and trusted my instincts and went back.

Once we arrived at the hospital again. I was checked a couple of times over a few hours. I had only dilated a little more to 2 and a half cm. The doctors and nurses once again told us 'we must leave' and that I must 'try and sleep!

At this point, I was very stressed, emotional and overtired due to lack of sleep and began to cry. My husband clearly distressed at how I was being treated, put his foot down and told the hospital that this is ridiculous!! 'why should we go home when you know that we live so far away?

We also reminded them that this is my ninth pregnancy and that things can change very quickly. They knew this information due to the medical history that I have laboured quickly in the past. The doctor seemed disgruntled and went away for a short while. When they/ she came back they /she said they had 'twisted a few arms' and said it 'wasn't easy'. They said we can stay at the residences across the road from the hospital, it, however, costs \$60 a night.

We reluctantly agreed and arrangements were made to go over there.

Before we left the midwives had said I needed rest so they told me to take a sleeping tablet and strong pain relief which they had provided. We made our way over to the residency. We got to our room. It was basic, with 2 beds, and tea and coffee making facilities. It was not overly clean. There was a shared bathroom, but it was down the corridor. It was one of the hottest days (35 degrees ++))of the year and without air conditioning, labouring in the heat was extremely difficult and tiring. There was a small fan in the room but it was not very powerful. My husband had to keep wetting towels with cold water to keep me cool. Every time I had a contraction I needed to go the bathroom, and because the bathroom was down the corridor, passed several other rooms, my

husband had to walk me down there every single time because I kept contracting whilst I was walking, and I felt light headed due to the medication I was taking.

Please understand that the residency is not suitable for a woman to labour in, especially in 35+ degree heat! No woman should have to labour in such an environment as that! Especially with a fully equipped state of the art Maternity unit just meters away. It is just not suitable! I should have been allowed at the hospital!

My husband had found a wheelchair with a wonky wheel and was wheeling me around in circles around the hospital for about one hour. We were angry, tired, fed up and felt humiliated and bullied into the position we found ourselves in! The entire experience was horrific.

Despite the medication I took I still could not sleep. I was too hot and in unbearable pain at this point. I truly felt my labour had progressed and I could feel the pressure from the baby's head. My husband, now very concerned for me rang the delivery suite and told them that I could no longer cope with the pain and thought it was best we headed back over. My husband was worried they if we didn't leave soon he could be delivering the baby himself!

Their response was that they are very busy at the moment and that if we headed back now we would be waiting in the tea room with everyone else who was also waiting. We thought this was terrible, and so my husband said to the midwife "what is Calvary hospitals status at the moment" Can we go there? Their response was that they could not possibly say what their status was or how busy they may be! Then they put the phone down on my husband. Which was incredibly rude!

After the phone call, we felt really uncomfortable about going back. We felt like we had just been fobbed off! Again lacking in the duty of care department!

My husband wheeled me around in the wheelchair for another hour! I cried in pain at every movement. At this point, I'm over exhausted and also very frightened because I didn't know if the hospital were going to see me and deliver my baby on time! I felt like they did not care and I also was made to feel like I was a nuisance to them! As I said we left it an hour until we headed back. My husband then wheeled me over to the delivery suite.

We got to the front desk. I was in floods of tears, and in extreme pain at this point. I remember the front desk ringing someone and telling them how distressed I was. However, this did not seem to matter as I was told to go and sit in the tea room and wait with everyone else who was also waiting. My husband wheeled me down there. My contractions were very intense at this point, and I

screamed in agony with every contraction that came. My whole body was tired!

The people who were waiting were very distressed seeing me in this way. I felt bad but couldn't cope at this point! The people who were waiting in the tea room prompted my husband to take me back down to the front desk again. He raced me down to the front desk only for them to say again, to go wait in the tea room! My husband wheeled me down to the tea room again, but we moved outside to the decking area where it was a little quieter and out of everyone's way!

We did not feel welcome at all!

We were out on the deck for ten minutes before someone came to take us to a delivery room. I had three intense contractions in those ten minutes that I waited.

When we finally got to the delivery room I was examined. They were searching for my cervix, but all they could feel was the bag of waters and the baby's head. I basically I had no cervix left!! Dilation was well and truly done!! It probably finished an hour prior when I felt the immense pressure of the baby's head.

Had they fobbed me off and longer my husband would have delivered our son for sure! Within 30 minutes of being in the delivery room our son was born on February 14th at 11.30pm.

I cannot fault the actual midwives who delivered my baby as they were absolutely fantastic!

An hour after our son was born he had some breathing difficulties and had to go up to NICU for further tests and some breathing assistance.

I was told that because our son had gone up to NICU I could go to postnatal and I would be able to stay a couple of days. I headed to postnatal but unfortunately was sent packing in less 10 hours after delivery.

Every time midwives and doctors changeover I was told different information every single time and you have to understand that this is very frustrating and disheartening. One would say you will stay and the other you have to go. Very poor communication and extremely inconsistent.

The hospital knew of our situation and how far we lived but didn't make any effort to make things easier for us. We apparently didn't qualify for the Ronald MacDonald house because we didn't live over 100 Kilometres away!

Our son spent 7 days in the NICU, and we spent 7 days travelling up and down the hospital several times a day visiting our son.

On the night before he came home, they let me 'room in' with my son to which I was very thankful for but really wished it was offered earlier.

We are Thankful that my Son and I are doing well now but we are however very unhappy with how we were treated during this time.

I can see that the hospital does not have enough beds and that your staff are under serious pressure. The 'in and out' policy you currently have is not helping anyone. In fact, I believe it is both physically and emotionally damaging to people who the hospital has a duty of care to help (Mothers and Babies). Please change this policy before it gets even worse for expectant mothers, fathers and babies.

I hope to hear from someone soon in relation to this matter

If I can help you any further on your enquiries then I'd love to do so.

Regards

Claire Louise Hooker