



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT

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The Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services  
Via: [LACommitteeHACS@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:LACommitteeHACS@parliament.act.gov.au)

### **Submission to Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT**

I would like to submit my experience for review as part of the review into ACT Health's Maternity Services Review.

I would like to request that my identity remain anonymous outside of those on the Standing Committee, and that my name and contact details (or any other identifying features) be removed from my submission prior to any publication.

I do not have all the discharge summaries and other relevant medical records pertaining to my birthing experience at The Canberra Hospital for which this submission is related to, however I consent to the Review panel obtaining and viewing my files for the purpose of this Maternity Services Review.

I believe that the care I received under the ACT Maternity Services led to an infection (sepsis of an unknown origin) a week after giving birth to my fourth child.

I gave birth to our fourth child through The Canberra Hospital's Midwifery Program on the ██████████ 2015. As my daughter was overdue, I was induced, and was directed to give birth not in a Midwifery Program birthing suite, but in one of the birthing rooms of the maternity section at The Canberra Hospital. This did not concern me in the least, as my midwife would still be with me during the birth, so I was still receiving the continuity of care that I wanted by going through the Midwifery Program (which is fantastic – thank you for such a wonderful service).

My birth was relatively straightforward (in my opinion), however I lost a borderline amount of blood, but just shy of the cut-off to requiring a blood transfusion.

Due to a history of retained placenta (with our second child), shortly following the birth (but prior to having my tear stitched up), my midwife was accompanied into my birthing room by an obstetrician. Neither my husband nor I recall the name of the obstetrician, or if he introduced himself to us. I was told that, due to my history of retained placenta, the obstetrician was going to go into my womb and manually remove any remaining placenta. My midwife gave me the gas tube and told me she had turned it up for me to help with the pain/discomfort, and to hold her hand and squeeze while the obstetrician did the procedure. I had not had this experience for our other three children's births, and I felt trepidatious about what was to come.

My husband and my recollection is that the obstetrician grabbed a towel (a white hospital one that you would use after you have a shower) and inserted it into my vagina and then started to rub all the way around the inside of my uterus. I remember seeing my stomach and belly button moving around as his hand and the towel were dragging around inside me. I used the gas just prior to this procedure

commencing (as directed to by my midwife) and during the procedure. I am glad that I had the use of this gas. I had not had any other pain relief during my birth, nor after. The obstetrician told me that this procedure was necessary to avoid the need for any further intervention if any placenta was retained. The obstetrician then stitched up my tear (from recollection – and my position-, this procedure of stitching appeared in line with my previous three experiences of having my tears stitched), and left the room.

I was discharged from hospital later that day with our newborn daughter, and was enjoying my time at home with our new family member for a few days. I believe, from my and my husband's recollection, we primarily stayed at home for the time we were at home with our newborn until approximately a week later. My husband was at home with our newborn and me as he was on paternity leave. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] All of a sudden, I started to get very cold. I went outside onto our balcony, and found the sunniest part of the balcony and stayed out there. My husband got me a chair to sit on, but I continued to shiver. It was [REDACTED] in Canberra, a fine, sunny day, yet I was freezing. I continued to shiver to the point that I started to get sore muscles all over my body. I *think* my husband took my temperature and it was high. My husband was concerned, and called the Midwifery Program. He was directed to bring me into the Midwifery Program centre, which he did immediately.

I sat in the waiting room for a while, shivering, while my husband found a car park. Eventually, someone came out to speak to me. They could see that I was shivering uncontrollably. I was quickly taken into one of the birthing suites, and I believe I was hooked up pretty quickly to a drip, and had some other procedures done. I can't remember exactly what happened. I was taken to the post-natal ward at The Canberra Hospital, in a shared room with another patient who had had a Caesarean. I was still shivering uncontrollably. When I could finally get to the toilet, I would sometimes have to go all the way around a couple of long corridors as the woman sharing my room had lots of visitors, and they were often using our shared bathroom. As I was hooked to a drip, this was not easy, and I was so cold I had blankets draped over me.

Our three older children had to be looked after by my parents, which was difficult given our strained relationship. My husband would bring the children in to visit me as much as he could, and he also stayed with me and our newborn once I was able to be transferred to a single room.

During my readmittance back into the hospital, a number of tests and procedures were undertaken. I had a number of specialists and staff come to assess me, I don't know who they all were. I think I had a CT scan and ultrasounds. I think they suspected gall stones, mastitis, meningitis, and probably other things I can't recall.

In the end I was having continual antibiotics via the drip. I was having difficulty breastfeeding, but the midwives in the postnatal ward kept telling me I was breastfeeding incorrectly (I had breastfeed my other three children for a maximum of approximately four years total) and that I had mastitis and thrush. I subsequently found out that I had been treating thrush for no reason, and in fact had costochondritis from the birth (holding onto the bed rails, as I was advised not to push and I was trying to fight the urge). I was eventually put on a really strong antibiotic via IV, and that seemed to do the trick, and eventually I was discharged from hospital.

I was not able to enjoy the time with my very newborn daughter at home. I have always enjoyed the Midwifery Program, a great part because I am able to go home so quickly after the birth as I really cannot stand hospital and want to get back home with our newborn to start bonding and setting a routine as soon as possible.

My newborn baby and I had to stay in the hospital and bond. I understand that this is what a great number of mothers *have* to do, but if this was due to some inappropriate actions of medical staff at the hospital, I would like to know. It also meant that the bonding between our older three children and our newborn was further delayed.

I also subsequently developed symptoms of, and was diagnosed with, prolapse following the birth of my fourth child for which I have received some corrective surgery.

I believe that, given the timing of this infection (sepsis of an unknown origin), it appears possibly that I acquired an infection due to the introduction of the towel into my uterus by the obstetrician.

If you find that, after reviewing any relevant medical records in relation to my treatment at the Canberra Hospital around the time of our daughter's birth and my developing sepsis, and you find or suspect that there may possibly be a link in relation to my birth experience, could you please advise. I would really appreciate knowing what the cause of my suffering from sepsis so soon after giving birth was.

I am happy to provide further information or clarification if you require it.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

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