



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

Submission Number: 49

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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health, Ageing & Community Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

re: Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT.

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to share my experience of care after giving birth at The Canberra Hospital. I believe it is relevant to the inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT. Specifically, I believe it is relevant to the Terms of Reference a), f) and h).

After my experience I wrote a complaint to The Canberra Hospital which I have included below as it contains the details. Please note that I have removed the names of hospital staff involved. My complaint was addressed by The Canberra Hospital at the time. I wanted to share my experience again in a hope that structural changes can occur to prevent this from happening to other women.

Below is a summary of my experience:

- Pregnant with twins, I was initially managed by obstetricians within the private system.
- Referred to the public system at The Canberra Hospital due to the likely early arrival of my twins.
- My twin baby girls were born at 31 weeks, on the 11th of May 2014, via emergency caesarean.
- The birth itself went very well and my babies received excellent care at the NICU and SCN.

Key points from my unacceptable experience and complaint:

- I was not given pain relief post-surgery.
- Shortly after surgery I could 'feel' my stomach. By the time I was taken back to the maternity ward, I was in terrible pain and requested pain relief many times, as did my husband. It then took 2.5 hours to be seen by a doctor, during which time I had not received any pain relief.
- Whilst lying propped up in bed and being examined, the treating doctor reclined my bed without warning and pressed by abdomen causing me to pass out in pain. The doctor then said something like '...how can I give you pain relief when you are passing out...'.
• After the doctor left, I was given pain relief as well as gas. I was unable to hold the gas tube and needed assistance to do this. It took about 4 hours for the shock and pain to subside enough for me to be able to speak and move a little.

Something that is not contained within the complaint is the ongoing impact that the experience has had on me. To this day, I experience anxiety associated with medical intervention, the thought of going through another pregnancy and when lying on my back. I am also fearful to require admission to The Canberra Hospital in the future.

Kind Regards,

Ally Gunn
10th September 2019

Copy of the complaint lodged in 2014

Which Service are you writing about?

The Canberra Hospital – immediate post-natal care and epidural analgesic cover.

What is the location of the service?

The Canberra Hospital – Birthing Suite.

What would you like to tell us about?

I had an emergency caesarean birth at The Canberra Hospital on the 11th of May 2014 at 9:30am. My complaint relates to my experience following my caesarean.

Firstly, I would like to complain about the inadequate pain relief I received immediately after my caesarean. In recovery I was given a slow release pain killer and did not receive any other pain medication for over 3 hours post operation. After recovery I was returned to the Birthing Suite when my abdomen began to ache. I requested pain relief at this time (approximately 1 hour post-surgery) and was asked to wait for the locum anaesthetist. I was told that she would be with me shortly. My husband and I repeatedly requested pain relief over the following few hours as the pain in my abdomen increased from 5 to a 9 out of 10. My midwife [REDACTED] was very supportive and made multiple attempts to request that I was seen to by the anaesthetist. The anaesthetist arrived approximately 2.5 hours after I first requested pain relief and prescribed medication. At this point, my pain was a 9 out of 10.

The second part of my complaint relates to the care I received from [REDACTED] and the manner in which she spoke to me as a patient. I was seen by [REDACTED] while waiting for the anaesthetist in the Birthing Suite. At this point my pain was an 8 out of 10. She approached my bedside and asked a few questions. Then without warning she proceeded to drop my bed flat. On the way down I called out in pain and desperately indicated to her that I wanted her to stop, but she did not. This caused agonising pain and spasms in my abdomen. I felt trapped due to the intensity of the pain and because I still did not have full movement in my legs post epidural. She then proceeded to press on my stomach which caused me to pass out in pain. My pain was at a 10 out of 10 at this point and I couldn't speak and found it hard to breathe. She then made a comment to the effect '...how can I give you pain relief when you are passing out...'. [REDACTED] then left and did not return. In response to this, my midwife [REDACTED] kindly thought to give me gas and once again requested that the anaesthetist come to see me ASAP. At first I could not hold the gas tube or breathe it in, so my husband had to assist me by moving it to my mouth. It took me about 4

hours to overcome the shock and bring my pain down to a level where I could speak and move a little (during which time the pain medication had finally been prescribed and commenced).

This was the most frightening and painful experience I have been through. The pain of labor and being 9cm dilated did not come close to this pain. For the rest of my stay in hospital following this experience with [REDACTED] I was very afraid of being hurt, did not sleep well because I was concerned that someone could hurt me and felt vulnerable and panicky. For weeks after this experience I also experienced a number of panic attacks at home when lying on my back.

From what I understand it is not best practice to press on a woman's stomach or to cause her to tense her abdomen immediately after a caesarean and I therefore feel that [REDACTED] was negligent in her care as well as uncaring and cruel in the way she spoke to and treated me.

What would you like to happen?

- Firstly, I would like to understand why I did not receive adequate pain relief medication post caesarean.
- Secondly, I would like [REDACTED] to know what I experienced as a result of her approach to my care. I would also like her to know that I think that the way in which she treated me and spoke to me was appalling and unacceptable. I would like the above to happen so that I have closure for myself and so that hopefully another woman does not experience the same.
- Finally, I would appreciate the opportunity for a debrief and to be informed about the outcome of this complaint.