



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: The Committee Secretary, Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services, Legislative Assembly for the ACT, GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601.
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Submission for: Inquiry Into Maternity Services in the ACT

To: The Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services

Julia Clancy

26/10/19

My experience details failures in the following areas:

1. Failure to document previous births and complications and act on the information that I had provided.
2. Failure to care for the emotional needs of birthing women.
3. Failure to listen to the women's previous experience and knowledge about her own body and births.
4. Pressure on women to be a certain weight or shape during pregnancy.
5. Pressure to act and sound a certain way in labor
6. No formal apology given for being sent home to birth alone when the hospital and midwife were aware of the possible complications from previous births that could be fatal to both baby and mother.
7. Pressure to have unnecessary intervention.
8. Complete disregard of the birth plan with no medical reason.

My story relates to the following Terms of Reference: C, D, F, H, L.

My name is Julia and I was booked in to birth at Canberra Hospital through the Birth Centre in December 2016. This was my third pregnancy.

My pregnancy was exactly the same as my previous two. I always carry big and measure 45 weeks at 39 weeks pregnant. I was upfront about this with my midwife but still was made to feel that I was 'wrong' and 'unhealthy' and that it was entirely my 'fault' that I was carrying my child this way. I was put through extra unnecessary scans and told to eat less. I was unimpressed that a professional would treat a mother in this way especially as I knew I could not change the way my body carries baby's. Why was I judged and pressured?

My labor began at 7am on 18 December. A day after I was due. It progressed normally and by 11 am I felt I needed the support of a hospital environment so we went in. When we arrived some questions were asked and I remember reminding the midwife that I had had a hemorrhage after my second birth. She was flustered and didn't seem to remember, even though I had already gone over my previous births in detail in the midwife appointments. She said that there was a mistake and I actually was high risk and I wasn't able to birth in the birthing suits and needed to go to the main part of the hospital. I was very confused. Why on earth was I being told this now? She said the other wards were all full so we would have to stay where we are for now but that I needed to have some shots after the birth to help with the birthing of the placenta and that I couldn't birth in the bath. Why were my records made by my midwife incorrect?

I labored a few more hours in the bath at the birth centre. I was not using any pain relief. My midwife began to ask to do an internal. I was reluctant. She eventually basically said you have to get out and have an internal because I was not allowed to birth in the pool. I reluctantly agreed. She did the internal. One of the things I was really adamant about was not being told how many centimetres I was dilated during my labor. This was in my birth plan and had been discussed with my midwife. I was happy for her to tell my support people - husband and sister - how I was going but I did not want to be told. When the midwife was reminded of this she basically rolled her eyes and disregarded my needs. She told me how

dilated I was and at this point I was 2-3cms. She then went on to say that perhaps I needed to have 'calm birth' courses next time as I was too noisy and 'overreacting' because I was not even in what they term 'active labor'. I was in too much pain to even respond and for my own sake had to switch off from her advice. I knew that my baby was going to be born that day and that she was wrong about my not progressing. I felt disregarded, ignored and disrespected.

She forced me to have a cannula put in my arm 'in case' even though I said no. In so doing she bruised me terribly (and we did not use it anyway). It made the rest of my labor harder because it was so uncomfortable. Since when does no not mean no? I was not respected. I was happy to take the risk if any of not having it done so I should have had that choice.

After I had another few hours on the bed laboring she said I had to have another internal and if I had not progressed she would have to send me home with panadol for the pain. I found this almost hilarious. Here I was say 8-9 hours into my third labor at 40+1 weeks and being told it was false labor. I was not listened to. She said since I wasn't now allowed to birth in the birthing suit that I should have to go home until 'real' labor began or I could go to the main hospital but I would need to agree to intervention, for example, my waters being broken and syntocin drip. My birth plan states that I did not want my waters broken, unless it was deemed absolutely necessary, but in this instance my labor was for me progressing perfectly and there was absolutely no reason why I should have to agree to radical intervention. I knew then that my baby was not going to be born at the hospital and that my only hope was to get away from this toxic midwife and environment.

I felt angry, disregarded and unsafe. All the information given to me was that I was wrong, I was too loud, I was not dilating as I had to, and that my two small requests in my birth plan were completely ignored. I did not want to stay in that hospital. I was given a wheelchair - which at this stage almost 12 hrs into my third labor - I couldn't sit down in, and I was begging my support people and the midwife to help me and give me pain relief as I struggled to make my way to our car and leave the hospital. I was ignored and basically treated as if I was hysterical and silly. I felt relief as I left in the car.

My husband and my sister in law were terrified as we drove home. During the 20 min journey home I was quieter and more relaxed. As soon as we got home I desperately needed to get inside and onto the couch - I ran holding onto my husband for support. Minutes after I lay on the couch I felt my waters break and the baby immediately descend. My husband rang the ambulance and they arrived 3 minutes later, by which point I had already birthed my baby boy on our kitchen floor. The birth was very fast and scary as his shoulder got stuck and my sister in law had to maneuver him out. I was relieved that he was born but also worried I might hemorrhage. When the ambulance arrived, I asked if they had the drugs to stop me hemorrhaging and they said no. Fortunately I didn't hemorrhage. We traveled back to the hospital in the ambulance less Than an hour after we were sent home for 'not progressing'. Given birth is highly mysterious and every experience is different - why was I, an experienced mother, not listened to at any point during my labor at the birth centre?

I am still enraged and sick at the thought of what happened to me. I know that some people may think I am overreacting. But the emotional and mental scars are there. When a woman is disrespected, forced into medical procedures or examinations she is uncomfortable with, told she looks and sounds wrong, and that her previous experience counts for nothing, when she is forced out of the place she was supposed to feel secure and cared for in, when her own health and the health of her baby is at risk because of overcrowding and protocol, then there is clearly some major problems. My story could easily have been far worse. I was incredibly blessed to have my sister in law with me who could assist in a very difficult birth. If she wasn't there our baby boy would have died or been severely disabled.

We were never properly apologized to by the hospital for what happened. They even wrote the hospital address on the birth certificate which we had to get changed. And after all of this, my husband rang to request we have a different midwife for the follow up appointments and was treated badly over the phone and pushed to tell them why. Again, we were not listened to. It was simple enough request that a traumatized mother not have to be around the midwife who had sent her home to birth.

It is now 3 years later and I cannot talk or think about this event without physically feeling sick and distressed. What may seem like a small thing to a midwife or staff member to a birthing mother is monumental. She is so vulnerable and she is trusting the professionals to get it right. It is not just about a good outcome. Mothers needs and bodies need to be treated with utmost respect because the fragile state she is in means that these events will haunt her for the rest of her life.

Julia