



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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Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services,
Legislative Assembly for the ACT,
GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601.

22 October 2019

To The Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Maternal Health Services.

My Name is S Wood and I gave birth to my first child on 14th May 2018 at The Canberra Hospital. I was supposed to give birth in the Birth Centre but due to the interventions required I was unable to do so on the day. When I first started writing this letter there were so many details and points I wanted to make that it ended up being 3 pages long and I hadn't even finished it yet. Instead I am just going to dot point the parts of my story I really want to high light.

- We were given incorrect information from the first doctor who attended us. He recommended I have an 'augmentation' (his words). I was very clear that I did not want to have an induction as it was likely to increase the pain and intensity of my contractions to an unmanageable level. The doctor said that this was different, that it wouldn't increase my pain and if it did, they could 'dial it back'. When the doctor left the room we discussed with the mid wife and she said it would be good to 'get things moving' as I had already been in labour for such a long time. I had it and my whole birth went downhill after that. The pain was like molten lava trying to burst through my belly and it just came in wave after never ending wave. As soon as this happened I knew it was going to be a really horrible experience.
- As I had feared this then led to a cascade of other interventions including morpheine and an epidural. The anaesthesiologist asked me to be quiet while he gave me the epidural. He then handed my husband a card and told him to call someone if he noticed any side effects.
- The second midwife we had during the labour told me the epidural is why my labour had slowed down. During the final stages of labour the epidural airlocked and she decided not to tell me as she thought I would be able to 'make it through' with out it. I feel very strongly that I should have been given that choice, especially since my labour was taking much longer than expected.
- My birth ended after 53 hours, two failed attempts with a kiwi cup, an episiotomy and forceps. My daughters head was so bruised, cut and bloody from the kiwi cup and the forceps and she wouldn't stop screaming because she was in so much pain. I had written in my birth plan that I was terrified of forceps and started screaming in terror when the doctor mentioned them. I don't know if anyone in the room at the time of the birth had actually read my birth plan. I understand that they were necessary in the end, but I think the conversation could have been better.
- By the time my daughter was born there were three midwives, three doctors for me and three doctors for her in the room. I later found out this was because some of the staff in the room were being supervised. Given the horrific nature of my birth and the very clear level of trauma I was experiencing I feel it was very inappropriate for

extra staff to have been brought into the room without my permission first. I understand that it is a teaching hospital but I was not warned or asked in any way before more people started coming into the room. I was screaming and crying “I’m going to die, my babies going to die. Why are there so many people?, What’s wrong?” , and everyone would yell over the top of each other to answer me. It was terrifying.

- My baby had trouble latching to my breast because her head was so sore. At one point someone bought me a breast pump, but I don’t think I was shown how to use it. Another nurse came to take it away and give it to someone else and it never came back.
- When we left hospital she still wasn’t latching. One of the birth centre midwives put us on an exhausting feeding and pumping schedule because she lost lots of weight and had jaundice. My regular midwife recommend going to the Early Days Clinic, but they gave much the same advice and I’m not really sure why we were sent there when it was something that my regular midwife was helping with anyway. The midwives were all wonderful and helpful but they could only come over every few days and given that my daughter was feeding properly I feel that we should have had help every day. Also, some research I did after wards explained that when you have epidurals, anti-biotics etc during labour this increases babies weight at birth. So I often wonder if her weight loss after birth was really that bad or if it was just from all the fluid I had during my labour.
- Because I had to give birth flat on my back I was in excruciating pain and could barely walk. My midwife recommended the hospital physio, which helped a bit but it was quite hard to get a follow up appointment. I saw my friend who is an Osteopath and this really helped. The same friend also recommended I take my daughter to an Osteopath which I did. After one appointment the lump on her head went down and she was already latching better. I feel that this should be something that is included in the after care for both Mums and babies.
- We were moved to three different rooms while we were at the hospital. First we were in the maternity ward, then we were moved to the birth centre, then we were moved to the paediatrics ward because there was a shortage of beds in both the mat ward and the birth centre.
- The staff bringing food trays around need to learn to knock. If I’m sitting around with my top off trying to breastfeed I don’t really want you wandering in with a sandwich.

In terms of positive aspects of our experience:

- All of the staff involved, particularly the midwives were aware that the birth was very traumatic and they acknowledged this to me almost immediately. Most of the staff made themselves available to talk through what happened and the midwife who made the decision about the epidural apologised and explained why she had made that decision. This all really helped me process my birth and my feelings, and I felt a bit better about the experience because of their honesty.
- The Birth Centre program is wonderful. It was great having the same midwife the whole way through (she wasn’t at my birth but that couldn’t be helped).

- We were offered the opportunity to debrief with my midwife and the senior doctor who delivered my daughter at a later date and it was very helpful. We had had time to process things and formulate some specific questions.

I guess what I really want to get across to this committee is that it's not ok for women to have no control over their births and it's not ok for women and babies to be sent home without sufficient aftercare, especially if they both have birth injuries and aren't feeding well. I still have weird flash backs about my birth and have sort counselling to prepare me for my next labour/birth.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

S Wood