

I have seen that the States are after feedback for the Maternity Ward here in Jersey. In all honesty, I have only just felt comfortable sharing my experience as it was so traumatic and I am still on quite a raw healing journey even a year in suffering from PTSD.

Without going into all the little details, I had planned for a home birth and had taken the hypnobirthing course. I started labour at home with the midwives coming to occasionally check on me (as after approximately 15 hours of contractions very close together) I was still only 1cm dilated. After trying the birthing pool and numerous different techniques to progress my labour, the midwives weren't sure if I was displaying signs of meconium so I was rushed into an ambulance and taken to the hospital.

When I was there, the shock of being in a dark tranquil room suddenly to the bright LED lights and the environment of panic, shocked my body. After being put on a double drip, another 15 hours passed and I was offered 'antibiotics' as my blood indicators were slightly raised (apparently nothing out of the ordinary during labour) and very cold, rude doctors who showed absolutely no empathy and I felt like I was just another number. I had 8 doctors and nurses rushing in and out of the room displaying panic and fear, talking to each other like I wasn't even in the room with panicky phrases like 'I can't watch this anymore'. This of course made me feel even more fearful and would have had a direct impact on my body and labour at the time. Surgeons, midwives, doctors- they all need to be aware of the fact we can hear everything, we are not invisible. After hours of labour later and completely ignoring my birth plan and wishes, I suddenly had my feet in stirrups being shouted from all angles to 'push for my life' by 8 different people and it couldn't have been more horrific. I felt completely disempowered and out of control. After trying a kiwi cup (research shows it should only be attempted 3 times and this was tried 6 times...) they were so rough and invasive with my body and I felt completely violated and dehumanised. It is a violation of women's rights, we have the right to autonomy over our own bodies and every woman deserves to be treated with respect and dignity during labour.

The midwives made a decision that an emergency cesarean section had to be carried out. I signed my life away whilst in a pretty unconscious, completely exhausted state of mind and remembering blurry letters and barely being able to hold the pen. I think this is just shocking that women are given these detailed sheets to read at this moment in the labour. A consent form should be displayed and asked to be read before you get to the point of being unconscious and being in labour for 37 hours, perhaps even in midwife appointments so that every woman is aware of the dangers and consequences of having a cesarean prior to their labour. This should be part of the education, there should be leaflets or videos to understand the risks so women have time to read through this with a level head. I was then wheeled down for surgery in full blown labour with the strongest contractions taking over my whole body as my son's head was already crowning at this point. They were half expecting him to arrive on the surgery table and gave it a few more minutes in case it happened. I remember a woman putting a mask on me, starving me of oxygen in that given moment when I needed it the most. There was no air coming through my mask and I tried everything to get her attention, only to be told that 'everything will be ok', when I was trying to tell her that I couldn't breathe. It was the scariest moment of my life thinking that I wouldn't make it through and I just had to completely surrender to what was going on as that was the only thing I could do. This would have been starving my baby of oxygen too, but thankfully, the general anesthetic was finally administered and I blacked out. Whilst this was all happening, my fiancée had been told there

is a high risk to both of us and therefore in this emergency procedure a general anesthetic would be appropriate and he must wait outside. After being dressed in scrubs to join us.

The aftercare was just as poor, I felt no empathy from staff and I was made to feel guilty for pressing the red buzzer in my recovery room so my son could be passed to me when he was screaming. I was on edge as I never knew what reaction I'd get from the nurses, most of the time no one would even speak to me and I'd be greeted with a completely unempathetic miserable member of staff (only one incredibly friendly and empathetic one called (member of staff), I will be forever grateful for her). I couldn't even get out of bed without help from staff and remember the discomfort being unbearable. There was so little support on the after care, absolutely nothing on breastfeeding (I remember trying to express and I wasn't shown how to use the pump properly and lost all of my milk which at the time was just so deflating). The food was awful, I had to get my fiancée to bring food and drinks for me as I couldn't even get a piece of fresh fruit, it was all in a tin. At a vulnerable time like this, a smile, some genuine empathy or encouragement would have made the world of difference.

My experience was truly scarring and I have had to seek private psychotherapist therapy for my healing over the last year (as my mental health has been adversely affected and has had long lasting effects beyond my birth experience). I have no previous mental health issues or record of requirement for this. It has taken me this long to find someone as no one has given recommendations and the aftercare was so poor. All the funding for this professional help has all been done by myself privately with no help from the States.

I realise that without a doubt you can prepare yourself theoretically for labour; but the simple harsh reality is that the birthing process is completely unpredictable. The experience of bringing your child into the world can be transcendingly, intensely beautiful, but it can also be traumatic, brutal and complicated. Bringing a human into the world can be the most magical experience even if you're labour doesn't go to plan, which is ok, but the lack of empathy and support from staff makes a significant impact on wellbeing and mental health going forward.

I won't be having my next child in the Jersey Maternity Ward. I feel on a small island this is completely unacceptable and change needs to happen.

I hope women speak up about their experiences and this is highlighted.