

## **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – a mother's tale**

I was visiting a friend who had recently had a baby. Inevitably, the conversation got around to talking about the birth. Whilst we talked, my friend started to explain how she had felt when she had had to give back her child whilst she was being stitched up. At this point, I started to cry. Since the birth of my child I had been experiencing regular bouts of insomnia, panic attacks, feeling angry or crying for no apparent reason. At family gatherings, I had an overwhelming sense of wanting to be anywhere else, that I did not want to be around people who were happy about my child's existence, when I felt like "death warmed up". Worst of all I did not talk about the birth of my child. For some unknown reason I found it too distressing. My partner and I knew something was wrong, but as I did not know what was causing this anxiety, there was very little we felt we could do. I just thought that it would eventually get better and go away. But it didn't. Then I visited my friend.

Due to unexpected complications, it was decided at the very last minute that I would need to have an elective caesarean. In itself the operation was successful. However, when the baby was born, he was not shown to me and I had to ask the sex of my baby because the surgical team ignored me. As nobody was telling me anything, I thought it was because there was a problem with the baby and that this was also the reason he was not being shown to me. I could hear my baby cry, and I desperately wanted to hold him, to comfort him, but as I was in the middle of having an operation I was unable to move. I just had to lie there, dealing with a mixed array of emotions, so choked up that I couldn't talk. When I eventually did get to see him, I discovered that he was a perfectly healthy baby and any feelings of panic, rage and dread were forgotten. Or so I thought.

Looking back on it, I did not know how to deal with my feelings because it seemed, in the great scheme of things, such a silly thing to get worked up about. It was not the worst thing that could have happened and I had a healthy baby, so what I was I complaining about. But having to lie there, not knowing what was going on and being unable to do anything was intolerable. For me the experience was a nightmare, one I was continually being reminded of because I saw him everyday.

Eighteen months after my child was born, I was diagnosed as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is thanks to a supportive and understanding partner, Health Visitor, GP and cognitive therapist that I am now receiving the help I so desperately needed. The feelings of wanting to run and hide are diminishing as I become more proactive in how I deal with my problem. I still have bad days, but at least I do not feel so isolated or that I am wasting people's time.

According to the Birth Trauma Association (BTA), birth related PTSD affects around 10,000 women a year and as many as 200,000 show some of the symptoms. It is a problem that by its nature may not be easy to talk about and so identifying it may be difficult. As a result appropriate help may be hard to find.