

Hannah's Story

I went into hospital "A" on Sunday to be induced as I was overdue. I was nervous but grateful that I would not be heavily pregnant anymore as I was thoroughly bored.

The midwife used one pessary and then I was sent for a walk and had something to eat. I went up to the ward about 9.30pm. I went into labour in the night. I asked for pain relief but they were short staffed so it took a good 45 minutes to get me some as they forgot. Eventually I had some pethidine and I slept for a few hours before waking regularly with contractions. My mum and Matthew (partner) arrived about 9.30 in the morning to find me in labour. It was 1.30pm before I was able to go to labour suite. In the meantime I had no pain relief and had to share the bay with another pregnant woman. I was very conscious of her as she was on her own and I felt the last thing she wanted was to listen to me having contractions.

Down in the labour suite I had gas and air which helped for a while but then I needed something stronger. It was felt that an epidural would be best but I am scared of needles and worried that I would not be able to stay still. I so desperately wanted to be told that I would be fine but they didn't because of the risks involved, now was not a time for me to be fretting about the risks, it was reassurance I needed, but I was scared. I had the epidural; it had to be done twice, the first time it was in the wrong place and it took a while for it to work properly and a lot of fiddling. By this time I had had the gas and air taken off me as they felt I was taking too much. In truth it wasn't really having an effect but helped me control my breathing. Later I was sick because of it and continued to be sick until I'd given birth.

I was able to have my cousin in with me as a midwife since she worked in the hospital which really helped. I was unable to have anything to eat or drink for over 12 hours because of the sickness and the only way I could quench my thirst was to suck ice cubes. Matthew was getting stressed because he doesn't like sickness and this upset me as I knew it was my fault he was upset.

Eventually it was getting nearer the time for me to push. I had had my waters broke earlier. The doctor asked the midwife to increase the drip to intensify the contractions only she didn't so when the doctor returned an hour later I had to wait a further hour for the drip to take effect. This gave me more time though to try and get the baby's head turned as it was facing the sideways, after a period of lying on my side this worked.

I was given about 1 hour of pushing before the doctors returned with forceps. I had misunderstood the situation though and I thought that when they returned they were taking me into theatre for a forceps delivery and I didn't want to do that. So I got all distressed and told them to come back in 15 minutes time as I needed more time. They agreed and returned armed with forceps. All I remember is being tugged at then a large baby being born on the Tuesday. He was 9lb 5oz and healthy. They gave him to me but I didn't want him I was too tired and in pain as my epidural had ran out just as I started to push. I couldn't understand why they thought I would want to hold him when I was being stitched up, desperate to be sick. But then I felt bad for not wanting to hold my new born son.

Joshua was 17 days overdue as my community midwife worked my date out wrong despite being given an accurate date from scans.

I eventually returned to the ward later Tuesday afternoon and left in my cubicle. Matthew went home as he was tired and I tried to sleep but I was in too much pain. I phoned my sister to come over and unpack my bags for me, I am so grateful she did as I couldn't even change his first nappy.

I struggled with breastfeeding as he wouldn't latch on and was full of mucus. I was given conflicting advice from the midwives on duty and I just didn't know what to do for the best. All I wanted to do was go to sleep but I couldn't because of all the tests and feeding that had to be done.

My blood tests results showed that I was anaemic and a midwife advised me to have a transfusion but the doctor said it wasn't necessary, but I had said that this is what I wanted.

There were occasions I had to ask 3 times for pain relief but they were too short staffed to remember. By Friday I was fed up and wanted to go home, I was discharged but one midwife felt it was too soon because I still hadn't mastered the breastfeeding. I agreed to stay until the afternoon and left about 4.30pm. Prior to my discharge another doctor told me that I could manage on iron tablets and a transfusion wasn't necessary. However it was recorded in my notes that I refused a transfusion, which I didn't I would just agree with the doctor. Half the problem was poor English spoken by the doctors, I couldn't understand what they were saying, and so I would just nod politely.

Two hours later I collapsed on the floor at home and was taken to hospital "B" by ambulance where I had a blood transfusion. My iron levels were about 6-7 and staff were horrified I'd been sent home with a blood count this low. I felt it was entirely my fault, I should have prevented it, and going through A&E of such a busy hospital on Friday night with a 3 day old baby was very frightening. I couldn't look after him but didn't want him out of my sight. I was panicking about feeding him and where he would stay. Thankfully I was able to stay in labour suite. The staff were great and helped me with feeding, showing me how to do it properly.

I was taken to the ward early Saturday morning where I stayed until Monday. The midwives were great they looked after Joshua at night so I could get some sleep. I was still struggling to feed him, so they cup fed him some formula which was a huge relief. The ward wasn't so full and I felt like much more of a person rather than an object on a conveyor belt.

When I finally returned home my real problems began. My episiotomy was infected so sitting was a problem and I just couldn't fill Joshua. I persevered for over a week topping him up with formula. Eventually I had enough and in desperation to get some sleep I gave him a bottle, I never looked back. The breastfeeding stopped and I was able to relax a bit more. It broke my heart though, racked with guilt about not being able to feed my own son, formula felt like poison and I knew it wasn't good for him. My midwife reassured me that it is best for baby that mum isn't stressed and that I was also ill and had to give myself time to recover. He had also had 2 weeks of breast milk so had received a lot of the nutrients. It infuriates me that mums are made to feel bad about not breastfeeding, we are told it is the most natural thing in the world to do, but in reality it is very difficult and expectant mums should be prepared for this so as not to feel like such a failure. I think it should also be made clear that its breast milk that it is best and not feeding from the actual breast.

I continued with things, fretting about timings and weaning. Getting worked up if things didn't work out. By August I had turned into an evil bitch. I couldn't see any happiness in my future and didn't feel happy about anything. I would cry or get angry over the slightest little thing and hated being alone with Joshua. Our sex life hadn't returned as I was scared of it. The only person putting pressure on me though was myself, Matthew was very understanding.

I went to see the doctor who gave me anti depressants as I have had depression in the past. I spoke to her about the birth and she reassured me that the transfusion wasn't my fault and I couldn't have known I would need one because the doctors didn't know. This helped time tremendously as I stopped blaming myself. We did write a formal complaint at the time but this didn't do anything to put my concerns to rest. My health visitor referred me to a local mental health worker, which worked wonders. I am now on the road to recovery. When I look back I think I had PND from early on, but I thought this was normal and didn't recognise the signs. I do remember thinking I still had baby blues 2-3 weeks after he was born and again thought it was normal.

When I look back at my time in hospital I think it is terrible that wards are so short staffed they can't look after all the patients properly. Midwives do their best in difficult situations and I don't blame them. Managers should be made to spend a few days in the shoes of a new mother and see how they feel. Maybe if I'd had better hospital care things would have been different as I would not have gone home in such a distressed state.

At no time after the birth did anyone discuss with me what happened, and I did ask for someone to do this. Perhaps if mums had the opportunity to do this in hospital less would be suffering from the traumas afterwards.