

Lucy's Story

My son was born 6 months ago and it was the worst experience of my life. The list of mistakes they made is endless, and it is a very long story, which is still difficult for me to write.

My pregnancy had been wonderful, with no problems. My contractions started the day before my due date. When they started to get quite painful, I phoned the labour ward for advice. I was told, very abruptly "You're obviously not in proper labour, take some paracetamol and go back to bed." I was given no support or advice, which was very scary as this was my first baby.

A few hours later, my husband and I made our way to the hospital. The pain was bad at this point but I was only 1 cm dilated so was told I could either go home or stay for pain relief. I chose to stay, but only on the condition that my husband was allowed to stay with me. There was no way I was going through this on my own. I was moved downstairs to let my labour progress.

After an hour, a senior midwife came in shouting "no men allowed, he has to leave right now!" I told her we had been told he would be allowed to stay, but she called me a liar. I was very upset at this point, and it was just luck that my waters then broke, which meant he was allowed to stay.

The pain got progressively worse over the next few hours, so I was transferred upstairs to the labour ward, where I presumed I would get an epidural. Despite begging numerous times over the next few hours, I was refused an epidural because they were 'too busy'. They kept telling me I was next in line, but it never happened. I have since been told the unit was so busy that day there were not enough staff to administer any more epidurals, and you only get one based on clinical need. I wish someone had told me this while I was pregnant.

My husband and I were left alone for the majority of my 24 hour labour. Most of the staff we did encounter were extremely rude and unhelpful, and did not keep us informed.

My labour did not progress as well as they had hoped, so I was eventually put on a drip to speed things up. The baby's heartbeat had not been monitored continuously up to now, only every 20 mins or so. I have since found out that for over an hour at this critical stage, it was not monitored at all. When they finally did put the monitor on they discovered his heartbeat was abnormal and he was in distress. They decided he needed to be delivered quickly by ventouse.

I needed an episiotomy. However, the doctor who cut me used a blunt pair of scissors to do this.

I pushed for 2 hours before my son's head finally appeared. However, the cord was wrapped tightly round his neck twice so it had to be cut immediately.

I continue to push, but then his shoulders got stuck. There was panic in the room, my legs were put up in stirrups, I was cut again, and midwives pushed on my stomach and chest until he was finally delivered.

He did not cry. He was not breathing because he had been starved of oxygen. He had to be resuscitated at the end of the room and was then whisked away to the Special Care Unit. While he was being resuscitated, the doctor stitched up the episiotomy. However, she didn't use enough anaesthetic and I felt everything she

was doing. I screamed at her to stop, but she totally ignored me and carried on until she was finished.

After our baby was brought up to SCBU, no one came to update us on his condition for 3 hours. We were abandoned. A midwife came in once to check my BP and give us tea, but my husband had to help me out of bed, wash the blood off me and put clean clothes on me.

5 hours later, at midnight, my baby was transferred to a different hospital for specialist care. I had to stay on a ward with other women and their healthy babies. My husband was not allowed to stay with me and the empty cot was left at the end of the bed. In the morning, the curtains were flung open, and I was on display for everyone to see. One of the nurses asked me had I not had my baby yet. The other Mums on the ward came to my bed to comfort me so I had to tell them the story. I was told by a midwife to "stop crying, because it will raise your blood pressure, and you won't be allowed to go home." No one seemed to care about the traumatic experience I had been through.

I was finally discharged the next morning but despite having lost a lot of blood, was not given iron tablets, just told to get them from a chemist.

My son spent a week in Special Care in a different hospital. The staff there were fantastic, informative and supportive, exactly what we needed all along.

The numerous staff we encountered when I was in labour were rude and insensitive. None of them kept us informed of what was happening. My baby's life was put at risk because they were too busy and just wanted to speed things up so they could get me out and move onto the next woman. I was made to feel as though I were on a conveyer belt.

I now know that what happened to my son may have happened no matter where he was, but what was a difficult situation was worsened by the lack of care and sensitivity I received afterwards. I believe the terrible way I was treated contributed greatly to the trauma I have suffered.

No one ever offered to explain what happened. I have recently had a resolution meeting at the hospital, but only because I decided to make a formal complaint. If someone had offered to go through things with me a few weeks after the birth, I believe this would have helped greatly, and answered some of my questions.

I have been left deeply traumatised by the whole experience. I've suffered with depression, anxiety, insomnia and flashbacks. I am still receiving counselling, and the cloud seems to finally be lifting. The future for my son will be uncertain for many years, though thankfully he seems to be developing well so far.

I have spoken to other mums about their experiences and many of them have also received poor treatment. The state of the maternity service in this country is an absolute disgrace. More decent midwives are needed and drastic changes need to be made to the whole system. I truly hope that by sharing my story, and making people aware of the situation that others will not have to suffer in the same way that I have.