

Neena's Story

My name is Neena and I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl back in Dec 2004. I had had a brilliant pregnancy - actually left work 2 weeks before my due date and had never felt better. However what happened to me on the 3rd of Dec when my beautiful baby was born was an experience that I'll never forget and that has since changed my outlook on life and attitude. I never imagined that I would end up feeling so scared, alone and angry. People, who know me well including my parents and husband, have raised their concerns about the type of person I've become. I've always been a strong individual – I was seldom phased by anything. My experience has shocked me so much that it's taken me almost 5 months to find the courage to write this. I thought that by avoiding it I would eventually forget about it, but unfortunately – it has many disguises and frequently rears its ugly head.

My contractions had started on the 30th November at about 6.30 am - my waters had broken and I had had a show - this was when my baby was supposed to be born, however, I was told to go back home as my contractions had stopped as soon as I reached the hospital. I was only 2 cms dilated. I was told I needed to go back to the hospital 48 hours later, if the situation remained unchanged.

My contractions continued to occur ever 5 - 9 mins throughout the day and night up until the 2nd. They were extremely strong – at one point – I was at the end of my tether and decided to call up the delivery ward. The lady I spoke to was appallingly rude – I think her name was Rose or Rosy – she continued to talk to me as though I was stupid – I hadn't been in this situation before – it was my first time, I didn't know what to do. She told me that she wouldn't admit me, as she didn't have enough beds! In the end I had to give the phone to my mother-in-law (we were staying with her as my house was being renovated) who is a senior nurse within the NHS who was then asked why I had given her the phone etc...and why couldn't I talk etc – this was at 4:30am on 1st Dec. I couldn't believe that an individual who chose to work within a profession that states “interpersonal skills” as a primary requirement was telling me off for not talking to her because I couldn't tolerate the pain and her attitude?. I was told to take some paracetamol and sleep it off. Had the pain been tolerable I wouldn't have wasted her time.

I was eventually admitted into the hospital in at 8:30am. I hadn't slept and was extremely tired, dazed - not quite sure of what was going on. I was taken to a delivery room that still had the remnants of a previous labour – blood on the floor and toilet. I was given antibiotics and put on to sytocine – and with the encouragement of my wonderful midwife remained on gas and air – extremely comfortably for hours. Unfortunately for me – my midwife and her trainee had to leave me as their shifts had ended. They really thought they would see my baby – however for some reason she didn't want to make an appearance.

My second midwife gave me a pethadine shot in my leg, which put me to sleep for an hour or so until I woke up with the sudden urge to push. The pain was now excruciating. At this point – the midwife and her trainee felt that I should refrain from pushing, as I was only 9cms dilated. I'm sure I was stopped from being allowed to push for what seemed like forever. When I was eventually allowed to push – I was told I wasn't pushing correctly – the midwife decided to push her fingers into my vagina – this hurt like hell. Then when this didn't work – she went on to fit a catheter – which she attempted to do 3 times – this was extremely painful. Another pethadine shot couldn't be administered as it would now effect the baby. Could I just

say at this point that if the trainee had not been in the room with me – I'm not sure I would have got through it. As a final year student she took the lead and was absolutely fantastic.

An obstetrician (not sure what these consultants are called) was called to perform a ventose delivery. As soon as this lady walked onto the room with her trainee – she stated and I quote “Ladies this really isn't on. I've already performed x number of ventoses today! Neena – you do realise that you'll still have to work hard at getting this baby out – it's not just going to be because of my efforts”

I couldn't believe this lady's lack of empathy, care and regard for me – hadn't anybody told her that I'd been having contractions since the 30th of Nov and had probably slept for a total of 2 hours! I was completely exhausted. I really can't remember her name. After she had delivered the baby at 3:42am - she then made a quip about how lucky I was for not having to go through a caesarean! There was talk of the baby's neck being crocked – but not sure if this was the case.

Denise told me how lucky I was to be stitched up so promptly – as normally women would be left waiting for hours. I know I should have been grateful about being stitched up so promptly – but with hindsight actually feel that this should be left until the placenta has been delivered. You see my placenta had merged – I'm sure they had mentioned this to me when I went in for my scans during the earlier stages of my pregnancy. What I'm about to explain to you now is so traumatic for me – I can't begin to describe the pain and depravity of the whole situation.

I was asked to push – to no avail. The obstetrician was called again and my legs were raised. She then went on to put her entire hand inside my vagina and sweep the placenta out. I barely had time to put the gas and air to my mouth – so I felt the full brunt of the most excruciating, sickening, raw pain I have ever felt. My stitches were painful and fresh. At one point – in my mind's eye - I was standing on the other side of the room watching her do this to me. I felt as though I had been transported back to the medieval days and half expected one of the midwives to hand me a glass of whiskey to help ease the pain. Why on earth women should have to endure this sort of pain in this day and age – especially when so much pain relief is available – is beyond me. When this failed (the placenta was coming out in bits) - I was told to push it out myself – or otherwise I would be sent down to theatre – which wasn't something they wanted me to go through as I'd been through so much already. The obstetrician said she would return to check on my progress.

I continued to try to push the placenta out but nothing was happening. The obstetrician returned – but instead of sending me to theatre – she decided to stick her hands into my vagina again. I was screaming in agony and couldn't believe what was happening...I was unable to talk or say anything. I bit down on the gas and air pipe so hard I cracked a tooth. It later turned out that my husband wanted to tell them to stop what they were doing – but couldn't talk either as he was in shock. He continues to be in shock to this day. Once again the obstetrician was unsuccessful – I would have to go to theatre. I've never read about placentas being manually removed in a delivery room. I thought this was done in theatre under general anaesthetic?

The experience left me feeling so terrified that I was unable to close my eyes for fear that I would die. I could hear the obstetrician's voice on the ward and felt as though she was going to come back to kill me. This sounds insane now but I really thought they were trying to kill me. I stayed awake for hours as I refused to go to sleep. I was eventually seen by the anaesthetist who then asked me to sign a consent form which scared me even more as one

section indicated that I could die or become paralysed. After a long wait I was taken down to the theatre at 7:30am.

I was given an epidural (something I had told the midwives I didn't want – but due to my bad luck had to experience anyway) and my body was numbed from the chest down. I couldn't feel anything. When they raised my legs I thought they belonged to somebody else! I couldn't believe the number of people who were in the theatre – I didn't even see the obstetrician and only realised she was in the room when I heard her voice. I really don't know how this lady managed to become an obstetrician She kept on apologising to everyone for the mess she was making – not once talking to me or reassuring me. She left without saying a word – she could have told me the operation went well etc. I didn't know how it went. At one point during the surgery the anaesthetist asked me if I was scared as my heart was racing. I was petrified. I was taken to the recovery room and then onto the ward. I had lost so much blood that I later had to taken an iron supplement for 3 months.

Once in the ward my baby and I were left unwashed for days. I was unable to move and tend to my baby due to the epidural. My baby was constantly crying I think due to the ventose – every time I asked for help I was told I would be seen shortly – everyone seemed to be rushed off their feet. Thank god my husband was there with me – he changed my baby's nappy for me and made sure she was close to me so that I could feed her. I wasn't producing enough breast milk – I later discovered that this was due to the trauma I had experienced - At night when my baby cried I was told off by one of the nurses – for not feeding her or changing her nappy – how could I? I couldn't feel my legs! I was then told off when I got out of bed to get my baby. My husband had to leave at 10pm – if he was allowed to stay I could have got some rest or it may have helped the nurses on the ward, as they were short staffed. The whole experience was awful. I ended up in tears – another patient on my ward came to my defence and got some help – my baby was taken away and then brought back as she needed a cuddle.

The second night was even worse – not sure how many days/nights I was in – it all seems like one long night – all a blur. I asked the night manageress if I could get some SMA milk as I wasn't producing enough milk. I was made to feel like a 2 year old when I was asked to show her how I was breast-feeding the baby. I realise that its paramount to breast-feed a baby – and that some women tend to dislike doing it – but I can assure you this was something that I cherished and longed to do. I couldn't believe I was unable to produce enough milk for my baby – she had latched on straight away – I didn't have any problems with that at all. My husband was allowed to deliver some milk - which was (thank god) collected by a wonderful Spanish lady. I wish I could remember her name. She was a light at the end of a dark tunnel. I think she was a health care assistant – wore a light green uniform. She showed me how to bottle-feed the baby, reassured me that I wasn't to worry about the baby crying, showed me how to burp the baby, emptied my urine bag, which was at bursting point – she was everything I was expecting during my stay – a true professional who genuinely cared about her work.

The next day – I thought I would be discharged – another obstetrician had come to look at the baby and asked me if I thought the baby looked jaundiced – how on earth was I meant to give a professional opinion – surely this was her job? I waited for her approval to leave from 9am until 4.00pm – it took her that long to tell me that I wasn't allowed to leave the ward. There was no way I could possibly endure another night in that ward. It was like Beirut. There was litter everywhere, visitors were bringing in their own food – everything felt unhygienic. My baby and I were still covered in blood – it was chaos. When I told the doctor that I wanted to go home and that she could look after the baby – I was asked whether I cared enough about my

baby as she was doing this for the benefit of my child. I was absolutely disgusted by the fact that this woman – who looked extremely young and probably didn't have any children of her own, could accuse me to not caring about my child. It was only until I told her about the lack of care I had got whilst at the hospital and how traumatic that last few days had been – and how disgusting it was that I had to go home to have a shower – gone are the days when you actually feel safe or clean in hospitals – that her colleague intervened and allowed me to go home. It was also at this point that a private room had miraculously turned up – even though I had been asking for a room from day one.

I was in the SCBU unit. The standard and competency of staff within this unit was a complete contrast to the staff in my original ward. Everyone was extremely understanding and helpful. Even the night manageress I had bumped into the night before seemed to have changed her attitude. I spent the entire night making sure my baby was being fed every 3 hours and remained clean and content as she received treatment. It broke my heart to have to blindfold her and then leave her in the incubator. Again I refused to sleep as I was determined to make my baby better and felt paranoid that she would die. I was relieved when I was discharged the next day and couldn't wait to go home. Finally being able to take my child home should have been an exciting time for us. Unfortunately due to the treatment we had received and the trauma/shock we had suffered, this achievement remained sombre.

Now almost 5 months later – I still haven't been able to get over my experience. There hasn't been a night when I haven't dreamt about giving birth or re-living that day. I even have contractions. I'm terrified of going to sleep at night. Nothing makes me laugh or happy anymore. To an outsider – my life would seem perfect – beautiful daughter, gorgeous house and cars, brilliant husband – but to me – it just makes me sad.

My relationship with my husband and family has deteriorated due to the anger and resentment I feel. I'm unable to have a physical relationship with my husband, as I'm petrified my stitches will tear. You may accuse me of being over sensitive, a drama queen, but believe me when I say that the amount of pain I had to suffer has disfigured me emotionally and physically – in a normal situation I would have chosen to ignore the sarcastic comments that were made, however in this case they have only helped fuel my anger. Friends and family will tell you how much I've changed and how sad it is for them to see me like this.

Nobody should have to experience what I've been through - especially not from a team of women. I'm sure that had I been treated like this by a male obstetrician, there would have been uproar. Although the standard of treatment within our hospitals is now so poor that I wouldn't be surprised if the latter was ignored.

I can't believe that nothing is being done to address this problem. For example, although a lot of media attention is being focused on the sudden increase in the number of caesareans that are being conducted. Nobody stops to think that this rise may be related to a decline in the standard and competency of staff now found within NHS maternity wards. All blame is shifted onto the expectant mother – who is frequently accused of being lazy.