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Law Firm Supports Birth Trauma Awareness Day

Specialist lawyers from Irwin Mitchell solicitors are backing a national campaign to raise awareness of the problems caused by birth trauma.

Saturday 15 August 2009 will be the third annual National Birth Trauma Awareness Day, organised by the Birth Trauma Association, a voluntary organisation that supports women who have suffered problems during child birth.

Birth trauma can lead to serious injuries to both mother and baby, and in severe cases can even cause deaths. It can cause mothers to tear or haemorrhage, and can leave babies affected by life long conditions such as Cerebral Palsy or Erbs Palsy. Some mothers also struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Families may be left facing the expense of home adaptations and physiotherapy and, with little or no support, the effects can be devastating.

Irwin Mitchell supports clients throughout the region who have been affected by ensuring they receive the necessary care, therapies and funding which are vital following birth trauma and the national awareness day plays an important role in this.

Julie Lewis, a medical negligence solicitor representing Irwin Mitchell's Bristol clients, said: "We need to continue to raise the awareness of the help that is out there for people who have been affected by birth trauma, whether directly or indirectly. There is help out there for everyone, but unless you know where to look it can be hard to find.

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“Irwin Mitchell is proud to support this day because the effects of birth trauma can be life changing for many people. There are people out there who are suffering alone because they don’t know help is available, and events like these can reach out to these people and provide them with the support they need.”

Julie Orford, Chair of the Birth Trauma Association, said: "The aim of the day is to raise awareness of birth trauma and the work of our organisation, so that families know there is somewhere they can turn to for help and support during what can be a devastating time."

For more information on birth trauma visit www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/.

Case Study - Alison Douthwaite and daughter, Ettie

Five year old Ettie Douthwaite has cerebral palsy. She is unable to move independently or talk after she was starved of oxygen at birth. Her mother, Alison Douthwaite (35) from Frome in Somerset, had a completely normal first pregnancy and she was offered the option of delivery at her local GP assisted maternity unit rather than being admitted to Bath Hospital.

Whilst in labour, baby Ettie became distressed but the midwives on duty failed to properly monitor her heart rate for more than seven hours. When Ettie was finally born at 7.20pm on 18th July 2004, the umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around her neck, she was blue and was barely breathing.

Even then, according to Alison, the midwives did not appear to notice the seriousness of the situation and instead asked husband, Neil, if he would like to cut the cord.

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“It was the most awful nightmare,” said Alison. “I could see something was terribly wrong with Ettie, but the midwives just said she needed a little oxygen.”

After working on her for several minutes, midwives made the decision to transfer baby Ettie to Bath Hospital. There she was treated in the Special Care Baby Unit for one month before finally being discharged home. However, it was not until five months later that health workers finally admitted Ettie had cerebral palsy.

Julie Lewis, a medical negligence expert with Irwin Mitchell Solicitors explained: “Alison and Neil came to us because they desperately needed answers – in particular, whether Ettie’s condition should have been preventable. When we gained access to Alison’s medical notes we discovered that soon after being admitted to the midwifery unit, Alison’s waters broke and traces of meconium (foetal faeces) were present which should have indicated the need for transfer to a specialist obstetric unit.

“During labour, intermittent CTG traces showed baby Ettie’s heart rate rising and falling alarmingly yet for more than seven hours nothing was done to intervene. Independent medical experts told us that had Ettie’s heart rate been monitored continuously it would have been quite clear that she was in distress and had she been delivered even half an hour earlier, she would not have suffered any permanent injury.”

Wiltshire Primary Care Trust, which is responsible for the midwifery unit at Frome Victoria Hospital, has admitted liability and made an interim payment to provide Ettie with the care and special equipment she needs.

Alison said: “Ettie is such a happy and determined little girl and she is a constant joy to us. However, the fact remains that she will never be able to run and play and do all

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the everyday things other little girls her age are able to. Her whole life will be very challenging because of the trauma she suffered during her birth.

“In hindsight, I don’t feel I was given sufficient information at the time to make an informed choice about where I gave birth and in particular the lack of medical intervention available on-site if something went wrong.”

She added: “Organisations like the BTA do fantastic work because women who have suffered birth trauma of any kind can often feel incredibly isolated. Having another parent to talk to who has experienced similar emotions can be a real lifeline.”

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Irwin Mitchell

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