

After seeing that a review on the maternity services in Jersey was being conducted, I have wondered whether to share my experiences as even just thinking back to having my first child in 2018 is traumatic for me.

I gave birth to my daughter in March 2018 following a bumpy pregnancy where my birth experience was traumatic to say the least!

Starting at the beginning, when I was around 9 weeks pregnant I had severe bleeding which I was seen on Rayner ward for. Luckily all was well and the bleeding stopped. At my 12 week scan, I was advised that I had a blood clot and that hopefully this would disperse as time went on but I was referred to a consultant the next day to discuss this further. The consultant told me that due to the clot they would monitor me and I would potentially have a c section if the clot remained as this could also impact my babies growth. To cut a long story short after multiple scans I was given the all clear for a natural birth after my 32 week appointment. Being in limbo on what type of birth I would have was a constant worry but I was reminded by a rather unhelpful midwife at one of my antenatal appointments that 'they don't have a crystal ball'.

I went into labour at 3am on a Saturday morning and decided to wait the first part of labour out at home as I know it can be a long process. At 4pm my contractions were still bearable but I decided to ring maternity and ask what I should do. I was invited to come in to be examined but then sent home as it was too early and that I should only come back to maternity when I had 3 contractions in ten minutes. I rang at 7pm that evening but again was told that unless I had 3 contractions in 10 minutes that I should stay home. I was also told that as I was able to speak clearly on the phone that I can't be that far a long in my labour as if I was then it would be too painful to speak!! At 5am the following morning I still wasn't having 3 contractions in ten minutes but the pain was too intense so I decided to go back to maternity where I was examined again and told I was 4cm dilated and should have gone in earlier!

I opted for an epidural around 5pm that day and following it being administered I advised the midwife on duty that I was still having pain and could feel everything including lots of liquid around my back and bottom. The sister on charge came in and told me sometimes the epidural can take a while to work and then took the gas and air off me and told me to think of my baby and not have too many drugs!

It wasn't until a doctor was called at around 9pm due to my baby's heart rate dropping that I realised how bad I had been left. When the doctor arrived, he was not impressed with the midwives and started shouting about the condition I had been left in. He looked at the epidural site and saw it had not been administered properly and immediately called the anaesthetist back to re insert the epidural as he decided I needed an assisted delivery to get my baby out quickly. When the anaesthetist returned she was mortified to say the least but equally annoyed that the midwives hadn't checked me properly. Due to this it turns out I went nearly 4 hours without pain relief because 'epidurals sometimes take a while to work and I need to think of my baby' - there was no apology from the sister in charge for taking the gas and air away from me either!

With the pain relief working I was told I had to get my baby out in 3 pushes as her heart rate was dangerously low. I had an episiotomy and a forceps delivery, and my baby was out within the 3 pushes. Luckily after being checked over by the paediatrician my baby was fine but unfortunately this wasn't the same for me.

I had suffered a 3rd degree tear (something I had never heard of before and only told I had the following day) and needed to go to theatre for repair immediately. This meant I was taken away from my baby for an hour whilst in theatre and my husband was left in the delivery room on his own with a new baby and a room covered in blood! He wasn't even shown into my private room where I was taken after theatre. This was confusing for me as all I was told is that I needed stitches and the light in theatre was better – it wasn't explained to me what had actually happened.

On return to my room when my husband arrived, he was told to leave as partners aren't allowed to stay and it was already midnight. This left me upset to say the least. Following a traumatic birth I was left alone in shock with my brand new baby and my husband was sent home to worry about us all night. That night I saw a midwife once when I rang the bell to ask for a bottle for my baby at 3.30am. She came in, gave me the bottle and my baby (as I couldn't move due to the epidural) and then she didn't return until 5.30am. I had been left alone with no sleep for two days holding my baby unable to even put the bottle back on the table.

The next day when the doctor came to see me he apologised for the traumatic delivery and explained that had he not have acted quickly the situation would have been fatal for one of us. I didn't take this in at the time but it is something that really sticks in my mind. In regards to the third degree tear, I was never educated fully on this until my 6 week follow up where I was told that I could suffer life long implications

of bladder and or bowel incompetence. Luckily I haven't suffered either 3 years on but I am told this could happen later on in life.

I count myself extremely lucky not to suffer with any issues as I feel that my life would be over – I don't even think I would be able to leave the house.

Following this I decided that it was too traumatic for me to have any more children even though our plan was never to just have one child but I was too worried I would experience the same issues and have life long complications.

On reflection, one of the stand out things for me is that throughout my problems in pregnancy I was constantly told by the midwives when I asked questions that 'no two pregnancies are the same and that they don't have a crystal ball' yet when giving birth the midwives are so black and white and assume that everyone labours the same with 'three contractions in 10 minutes' – something I never had even when 10cm dilated! Maybe if they didn't try and be textbook when it came to birth, issues wouldn't occur so frequently!

After numerous discussions with my doctor, I decided 2 years later that we would have another child and I would seek private antenatal care with a c section delivery as this would be the best option for me. I can honestly say this is the best decision I have ever made and I am so grateful for (Member of Staff) for allowing me to grow my family and feel safe and educated throughout the pregnancy and my delivery which was faultless and completely stress free.

It's a shame that to have an additional child I felt the only safe and happy way to do this was to pay nearly £10,000 as I have no faith in our maternity services. This is not only just because of my views but I have also heard so many horror stories from other mums regarding their births on the maternity ward. Unfortunately, I think it's only a matter of time before we have a fatality like Guernsey.

In addition to the above issues I also encountered issues with the way I chose to feed my babies. I exclusively bottle fed both my children from day one and never even tried to breastfeed due to personal preference. I feel as though the midwives in the maternity unit and the community midwives are more dismissive of mums who bottle feed and make you feel like a failure and favour those who breastfeed.

It is also important to highlight the bias that new mums are having to face at the maternity unit due to private hypnobirthing classes. I personally don't feel that those midwives who carry out private hypnobirthing classes as their 'side business' should be working on the maternity unit also. There is great pressure to buy into the hypnobirthing theory and it feels as though their 'customers' are offered more support/assistance in maternity than those who haven't attended the classes.

Other ways in which the maternity unit could be improved:

- Keep the same midwives where possible through pregnancy/delivery/stay in hospital
- Sleeping facilities for partners when a baby is born late in the evening/night
- More education on complications of birth such as different tears
- Regular check ups by midwives, for example, coming to you every hour to ask if everything is ok rather than waiting for you to ring the bell and feel like a nuisance
- Advice before giving birth to explain what to expect in maternity and also what you need to take in your bag/what is provided by the unit