AIMS For a better birth...

Navigating a hospital mistake that could have changed everything

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By Julia Mihaylov

On the way to motherhood, every twist and turn draws a unique story, and my second pregnancy took an expected detour. Now, as I watch my vibrant 18-month-old daughter giggling and playing, I reflect on the difficult experience that unfolded exactly two years ago today.

It all kicked off when I found out quite early in the pregnancy that I had a hematoma, an occasionalhiccup during pregnancy. Despite the disconcerting bleeding, physically, I felt fine. However, a visit to the hospital became inevitable as the bleeding persisted. Little did I know that this visit would set off a chain of events that could have led to a heartbreaking outcome.

Upon arriving at the hospital, the shocking revelation hit – my waters had broken at just 17 weeks. Or so they claimed. Bewildered and confused, the medical team recommended terminating my pregnancy. Struggling to grasp this sudden and grave news, I called my husband for support. Despite the emotional whirlwind, I decided to take a moment to digest this information, as it was quite a lot to process already.

Hospitalised and left to my own devices for the evening, the isolation and lack of care heightened the distress. Not forgetting to mention that the food was awful, and they even forgot to include me for the dinner all together. Grateful for my husband's intervention, he brought comfort, food, and a semblance of

normalcy to an otherwise unsettling environment. It was also distressing, as I had a toddler at home, who was still being breastfed, and had never spent a night without me.

The next day, the doctors came for a discussion again, urging me to terminate the pregnancy. This time, the reasoning was the potential trauma if I lost the baby further down the line, say around 28 weeks. As if you would not experience trauma, if you terminated now, or at any point in pregnancy, thought I. And anyway, nobody explained to me what it would be like to continue with the pregnancy or what the risks would be.

My husband and I, both having only experienced the miracle of home birth previously, with our first child, felt out of place in the clinical and cold hospital setting. We decided against the medical advice, and left the hospital, on the condition that we understood the risks that they claimed i.e., I might go into labour in the next 24 hours.

During my time in the hospital I sought information from online communities, as I was not given enough information from the midwives or doctors. I found women who shared similar experiences, and a whole Facebook group with thousands of women who had either lost babies or had incredible survival stories of women with premature rupture of membranes. I was determined to fight for my baby's survival, even to fight through the rupture of membranes.

Days later, we had an appointment with our obstetrician, who delivered surprising news. We had a scan with a specialist doctor, who told us that my water levels were normal, and there was no evidence of a rupture. She questioned the initial results, prompting further investigation.

The same doctor decided to discontinue the use of the test that led to my misdiagnosis. Despite the claims of accuracy from the pharmaceutical company, the hospital acknowledged the fallibility of the test for pregnancies below 20 weeks. After my case, three more women had their babies saved, because of this change within the whole hospital Trust. Instead of using the tests, they started observing the amniotic fluid levels instead. Ironically, this was already the process in the other hospital Trusts, and in some other countries anyway.

This made me wonder about the whole hospital Trust system in the UK, and how it operates. How can it be that when other hospital Trusts are not using these tests anymore, my Trust persisted in using them? Clearly other Trusts adopted up-to-date research evidence regarding the use of these tests, whilst in my hospital Trust, they needed my case to happen before they changed their practice.

Reflecting on my story, it was a great reminder of the importance of questioning medical information, trusting mother's intuition, and advocating for evidence-based care. If I hadn't challenged the initial diagnosis and decision, my daughter might not be here today. This narrative serves as a call to women everywhere – question, demand the evidence for recommendations, and be your own advocates. Healthcare decisions can be life-changing and mother's intuition is a formidable force that should never be underestimated.

Author Bio: Julia Mihaylov is a passionate birth worker, antenatal teacher and trained as a doula. She is also a yoga teacher, ex-professional gymnast, physics graduate, ex-finance professional for almost a decade and a mother of two. After having two beautiful home birth experiences, her life changed. Her babies gave her a gift of passion for childbirth. She got empowered to help other women with sharing evidence-based information and leading them to trust their instincts that are crucial in the birth process.