AIMS For a better birth...

Michelle's Story

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I'm lucky to have such a supportive husband and Kate, my Sure Start Midwife. When my labour started I went into the local hospital as my GP talked me out of a home birth. I wanted a water birth and used the pool for labour.

Shortly after an internal (I was 6cm) my waters broke and the pains became much more intense. I became more vocal and started to scream at the height of a contraction, although I felt in control, I asked for some entonox to help with worst.

A midwife in a navy blue uniform (I think she was in charge) came into the room during a contraction, and told my midwife to get me to 'quieten down, as there were other women about that didn't need to hear me lose the plot'.

The midwife looking after me kept asking the senior midwife lots of questions. The senior midwife asked me if I wanted pethidine. It wasn't something I wanted, and I didn't really want to risk the side effects. The senior midwife kept mentioning the benefits of pethidine, and how it would help me cope with the pain. After about 20 minutes, she was still going on about the pethidine, and told me that the 'Sure Start midwife had poisoned my mind'. In the end I told the her that I 'didn't want the f****** pethidine' and asked her not to mention it again.

The senior midwife left the room and returned with the hospital protocol regarding abusive behaviour towards staff, and told me that verbal and aggressive behaviour would not be tolerated. My contractions slowed and I was suddenly surrounded by a host of uniforms telling me to stop screaming. I tried to explain that it was my way of coping and I felt ok, but no one was listening.

A midwife (I think there must have been a shift change as I no longer recognised anyone) asked me to leave the pool as my contractions had stopped and this was abnormal. Feeling scared and defeated, I got out of the pool, and over the next few contractions started screaming again. An anaesthetist appeared and told me and my husband that he was going to be busy for the next 2 hours so if I thought I might need more pain relief as I wasn't willing to try the alternatives, then I should have one now. I could not see a midwife, and agreed to the epidural as I presumed I wasn't doing too well.

I gave birth to a healthy girl a few hours later, after two hours of active pushing, an episiotomy and a forceps delivery

I didn't see my Sure Start Midwife for ages, but my community midwife told her I wasn't coping very well

with my birth experience, so she rang. I picked up the phone and on realising who was talking burst into tears. She asked me how I was and I said I could have a thousand forceps deliveries, just not the treatment of the senior midwife. I had been made to feel powerless, a number, a thing to be kept quiet, it totally dominated the birthing environment. From the minute that woman walked in everything started to go wrong. I felt as though I had gone from a woman, coping and progressing well, to a thing to be dealt with and made to conform to the institution.

I couldn't bear the thought of anyone asking how it all went, especially any pregnant women, as there was nothing positive to speak of, and I didn't want them to know what they were about to let themselves in for. I had to avoid the road past the hospital as I just couldn't look at 'that place where they did this to me'.

I couldn't have sex with my husband if I was on my back as it created flashbacks to the treatment from the midwife. I went to see my GP, who explained that I was very lucky to have a healthy baby, and to let go of the experience as that what was having a baby was like. She nicely explained that having too higher expectations resulted in this kind of disappointment. The GP stated that she could help and prescribed antidepressants.

Initially I wanted to make a complaint, but as a mum I became so busy, and was trying so hard to keep it together that a complaint would just be too exhausting when I was trying to heal myself, especially as I don't feel that complaining will do any good.

I still can't drive past the hospital, but Birth Crisis Network have been brilliant, and enabled me to understand that none of it was my fault. In the earlier days I experienced a video like tape, going over and over, like it was on replay, and the memories of my treatment consumed my every thought but this is now under control. I still have the odd flashback, then I panic, but I am learning to deal with this, and it is slowly getting better. My husband and I have continued to be a strong partnership, our sex life is no longer an ordeal and I could not have recovered so well without his support and love.