AIMS For a better birth...

First Caesarean

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I very nearly died 7 and a half months ago at Odstock Hospital, having my first child. I suffer from fluctuating blood-pressure and fluid retention but was admitted for many weeks for 'pre-eclampsia' which not convinced I had, I don't think they were either.

I am overweight - but quite fit, I eat all the healthy things and keep active but have a fluids and metabolic problem. After a stay of three weeks I was told I could leave hospital as my blood pressure was normal. The following day at 36 weeks my waters broke, I was told to walk and have hot baths. The same evening I started to contract quite strongly and regularly, but was heavily sedated for the night, only to be taken down to be induced with prostaglandin and an 'extra strength' dose of syntocinon drip.

I spent 16 and three quarter hours lying on a bed, semi-sitting, using gas and air and pethidine, dilating slowly. I was given an enema, a fetal scalp monitor was screwed into my scalp while I was contracting and without warning.

At full dilation I was threatened with a caesarean section, an epidural that had been effective was accidentally yanked out of my back and I was given 30 minutes to push the baby out, difficult enough, with the baby in a posterior position. I was then shaved and plonked onto a trolley for a caesarean section.

The day after the birth I was hauled out of bed and made to walk to the bathroom and go to the toilet without help. I was kept from my baby who'd been taken to special care, a healthy 61b oz. boy with quick breathing.

When my husband took me to see Matthew for the first time almost two days old , he'd been named and tagged and cleaned like a product just bought from the supermarket, all control was taken from me - I felt the baby was nothing to do with me, even had to look at the tag to find out what time he 'd been born and how heavy he was.

Though I was trying to breastfeed he was retained in special care, having no treatment or monitoring for 10 days 'to get his feeding established'. I was taken to a post-natal ward of mothers and babies with only a photo of my son. Special care staff only let me bottle-feed after 8 days of my battling with them. Once, on a visit to the special care unit, I was told to put my baby down and return to the ward because he was asleep, this was after I'd been told to go there to feed, to be told he'd been fed an hour earlier.

I felt as if I'd been hit by a train in the vaginal and pelvic area and I couldn't understand why. I was allergic

to the metal clips in my wound, which was infected and gaping open for 6 inches of the 9 inch scar. The only treatment prescribed was that I bathe it myself with salted water and dry with a hot-drier.

This situation remained for 12 weeks, yeilding blood and pus and was raw, 'til it finally "knitted" together. No-one explained to me why the operation had been necessary. I was only told I'd never have another baby except by caesarean section. I was heartbroken.

When I first woke from the operation in recovery I was crying with pain but I was ignored, no-one told me my baby was OK or what it was. I thought the baby had died.

When I complained I had a visit from the director of the maternity unit. It was then I found out that I had almost died due to the effects of all the anesthetics used and the fact that, when the operation was in progress, they found the baby was so far down in the birth-canal that they had gone through the vagina to push him back into the uterus to do the operation. My perineum had torn at an awkward angle and had needed considerable stitching. When I asked why I had not been told what had been done to me they told me it hadn't been considered important!

I was devastated, having also endured several blundered attempts at internal examinations, with the consultant's full knowledge of the tear, and not telling me why I was in such agony. I was told I had cephalic pelvic disproportion. I asked for a full pelvimitary and the consultant confirmed this. I refused to believe this because of all the awful things that had happened. Eventually, I contacted Janet Balaskas of the Active Birth Centre in London and she suggested I see Dr Yehudi Gordon, an obstetrician, for a safe obstetric opinion. This I did, and took my labour details and copies of the pelvimetry x-rays to his clinic. He confirmed for me that there was, and is, no reason for me not to deliver normally, as I have a normal gynecoid shaped pelvis with 12.2cm inlet, 13.1cm mid cavity and 11.5cm outlet.

I therefore have taken steps for legal action against the authority and consultant who has ear-marked my notes stating that I must have repeat caesarean sections. When confronted with this information the director of maternity and the consultant refused to make further comment. We would like to have another baby next year and I need to hire an independent midwife for the 'active' natural birth I want at home. I had a lower-segment caesarean section scar which believe hardly ever ruptures, had no blood-pressure or other problems in labour, the baby and I were alert and well. We are told we must go into hospital to have our babies, we put our trust in the medical profession.

We all know accidents happen, but it is clearly not a mistake to calmly and calculatedly play 'god' with not one life but also that of an innocent unborn child. I have no faith in hospitals or hospital staff. I now consider, for me, a hospital birth is not the safest place to be.

Having found an independent midwife who will support me, I am quite determined that next time I will have a home birth, managed the way I want, for it is my belief that the control for bringing new life into the world should belong to the mother from whose body it comes.