

Summary:

This submission is about the death of my stillborn daughter, the unanswered questions I have and its effects on my life and that of my husband's.

I was pregnant with Hannah in 2014/2015 and it was my first pregnancy. Needless to say that my husband and I felt very happy and excited about having our first child. Like all parents we started choosing names and considering how to prepare for her. We went to all the appointments together and marvelled at the sight of our little girl growing and moving. During my pregnancy, every visit to the hospital, every scan, even the glucose test suggested that all was well and there was no reason to worry. I had no idea that there are six stillborn babies a day in Australia and that mine would be one of these statistics.

At no point in time during my pregnancy was I given any information about stillbirth. It was never mentioned even as a remote possibility. I believe that education is important and that pregnant woman should be aware that stillbirth is a risk during pregnancy. In no way should this be done as a means to scare any woman or family expecting, but rather as a means to educate and alert them to the possibility. It was my first pregnancy, I was among the first of my friends to become pregnant, and with my mother living overseas, this was all new and unknown territory.

Our world collapsed on Thursday the 28th May 2015 when we heard the fateful words: "I'm sorry there is no heartbeat."

My husband and I were left sitting all alone in a hospital room for around three hours without any answers, without any support. Someone came to take a blood test to eliminate some possible causes, and then the doctor came in to explain that I would be induced on Saturday. This was very troubling, as we had no idea what was happening, what to do, where to go and why no one could give us any answers.

I was seemingly a healthy young woman, the pregnancy had been going well and nothing could have led us to believe that we would lose our child. I would hate for anyone to go through it. I would strongly recommend that there be more support to parents; the discovery of a stillborn baby should be explained delicately, and support should be available for the inducement. I believe that it is important that professionals are trained to announce this horrible news to parents but also into accompanying them throughout this journey. I would have preferred to have someone to talk to on that day rather than being put in a room for several hours without appropriate help and having people tiptoe around me. I think it is essential that hospital staff are provided with training in how to cope with parents of a stillborn baby. While some of the staff was supportive, others tiptoed around me or treated me with pity. Afterwards, I had to research and find an association that would be able to help me deal with the death of my daughter. I researched pregnancy loss and contacted the stillbirth foundation so I could have some support and someone to talk to.

The autopsy performed on Hannah's body left us with more questions than answers. The only explanation I was given was that the placenta didn't retain any fluid and that even though she was 29 weeks, Hannah's head had not grown since 24 weeks. We were told that there was no reason why this happened, that it just happened sometimes. To this day, I still do not know why I lost my

daughter. I cannot explain why she is dead and I have no way to prevent this from happening again in any future pregnancies. I don't know if anything more than the autopsy and placenta analysis could have been done to try and identify the causes of Hannah's death. I wish that more were done to find out about the causes of stillbirth, about understanding why it happens and about finding ways to prevent this happening to other families. It is inconceivable that for the last two decades there has been no improvement in the rate of stillborn babies, and that in more than 40% of cases the cause of death is unknown. I am not aware of anything I could have done to prevent Hannah's death. I would have done anything in my power to prevent my daughter's death. Had there been more research and investigation into stillbirths, she might still be alive today.

Three weeks after my daughter passed away, I received a call from the hospital saying that my daughter was due for a vaccination as she had not received it. I had to inform the person calling that I had a stillbirth and hence the call did not apply to me. This was not right. I should not need to have explained to the hospital that my daughter had died, the same hospital where I gave birth and where they registered my daughter's death.

Hannah's loss has been devastating. My husband went on anti-depressants soon after, and I have been on anti-depressants since the birth of my rainbow baby. I have had to deal with heightened anxiety and even now, I am anxious trying for another baby, as I am afraid of giving birth to another stillborn child. Whenever someone tells me "I'm pregnant", all I want to say is "be careful and just wait until the baby is born." Both my husband and I also now have irrational fears concerning our living daughter. I feel guilty that I could not protect Hannah.