

Stillbirth Research and Education

February 2017 – a positive pregnancy test resulted in a trip to the local GP for blood tests to confirm. Upon those results also coming positive, we booked in for the first scan. We thought possibly 5-6 weeks, the ultrasound showed more likely 9 weeks with no abnormalities and all progress so far showing a healthy baby.

20 week scan also came normal and healthy with a baby girl on her way into our lives. At this point we started all future appointments through [REDACTED] Hospital, our chosen birthing hospital. All GP and midwife appointments were normal; tummy measurements, heartbeat, blood pressure etc.

August 2017 – 36 weeks and our last GP appointment until full term. Up until this stage we've had no further ultrasounds so haven't seen our little girl since 20 weeks! The GP felt my fundal measurements were on the smaller side and did a quick ultrasound which showed her sitting head down right where she should be and getting ready to come out. All other tests were normal so off we went.

September 2017 – 38 weeks and final day at work 2 weeks before due date, still kicking strong and moving often. Final midwife appointment, heartbeat and all tests normal. The final 2 weeks we noticed a reduction in movement and strength of movement which we thought was normal as we assumed because she was growing bigger there was less room to move. Having been told the movements could be more subtle leading up to the final days, we didn't think anything of it.

39 weeks & 6 days on Sunday 24th September, the day before she was due, I realised I hadn't felt any movement all day so up to the hospital that night where we told unfortunately she had passed away. Back in the following morning (Monday 25th, her due date) to take the tablet that will induce labour and we went back home for 36 hours to wait for the tablet to take effect.

Labour started the night of Tuesday 26th and we gave birth to our lovely little girl on Wednesday 27th September.

Our experience – We are absolutely overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation for the midwives at [REDACTED] Hospital. We could hear how busy they were in the ward at any time we were there yet they never hesitated to stop and sit with us, give us hugs when we were upset, or just listen to us talk about what we were going through. We were put in the quietest ward they had, as far away from other birthing parents as they could get us and with the door shut (and our music on) we couldn't hear anyone else. They made sure we weren't wanting for anything and after Olivia was born they were as unobtrusive as they could be while my husband and I had our time with her. There were times unfortunately when the door was opened and also when we were leaving the birthing suite that we could hear newborn cries, or other families coming/going. The cries were soul destroying knowing our baby had entered the world forever silent.

I had to stay overnight due to medical problems that arose post birth and we were moved to a room by ourselves out of the birthing room and away from the other maternity patients, they made sure [REDACTED] had something to sleep on in the room with me and that Olivia could stay overnight with us.

We were given an incredible amount of information about services available to us, memorial options (such as photography) and the midwives who helped birth Olivia took her hand/foot prints for a little scrapbook.

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Overall – the most important thing for us was that people allowed us to talk about Olivia the same as they would have if she had lived. From a medical side, everyone was absolutely amazing after we found out she had passed. We opted for a full autopsy and found she had a hyper-coiled cord (8 coils per 10cm instead of ~4) and after further tests revealed my coagulants were high. It was estimated the hyper coiling probably happened in the final two weeks as nothing was picked up in the doctor's scan 4 weeks prior.

Through the pregnancy, we said often that we thought it was funny there weren't more ultrasounds requested during a pregnancy and feel this is something that should be a requirement, especially in the last 6 weeks.

It was staggering to us how common stillbirth's are – we knew the statistics for miscarriages were high (1 in 4 we found) but we didn't realise how high stillbirth statistics are, and for late term stillbirths as well. These are things that need to be talked about more often! The Pregnancy Loss Australia and Sands organisations provided much needed support for us post loss and are asking for national recognition of October 15 as the day of remembrance. Knowing there are other people in our small and awful club going through the same as us was a comfort of sorts in the weeks following the birth, planning her funeral, burying her and then watching people we know start to move on/forward around us.

7 months down the track and it's still raw and painful to remember all the thoughts and emotions we felt. A few friends I know came forward and told me they had similar experiences – one of them 30 years ago! Her stillborn son died during emergency caesarean and would have just turned 30; it's still as painful for her now as it was back then and she hasn't forgotten a single moment of it.

My suggestion would be that more ultrasounds are offered throughout a pregnancy, especially towards the later terms to hopefully prevent any complications that may arise as the pregnancy progresses.

While we had a positive experience through [REDACTED] Hospital, it's my understanding that not all hospitals provide the same services we were given. I feel bereavement wards (or ward) needs to be a new addition to the maternity ward where a private birthing room is given to the parents away from other birthing parents. These wards should have all available services to grieving parents – photography options, memorial options, funeral options, support groups etc.

I feel that pregnancy/infant loss is a hard subject but needs to be raised more instead of hidden away. While people are mostly willing to listen to us talk about what we went through, it's a taboo subject that makes people uncomfortable and we feel we shouldn't talk about our baby girl. If the subject was raised more and in matter-of-fact kind of way, it would stop being such an uncomfortable topic.

Thank you for looking into this on behalf of us and other parents having gone through a similar thing.

Sincerely,