

Elective caesarean section: A patient's account

Lauren Neppe is a psychiatry registrar at Caboolture Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland and the mother of two children. Her husband Cliffe Neppe is a second year Trainee of the RANZCOG. She explains why she twice elected to have a caesarean section ...

My first experience of childbirth was as a fourth-year medical student at Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg, where the labour ward consists of a vast room divided into more than 30 cubicles separated by a plastic curtain that does not quite close. I had heard about the 'miracle' of birth and how it was the 'most beautiful experience', but this did not quite depict the scene I witnessed: the screaming women given little or no analgesia, certainly no epidurals, enduring episiotomies without even local anaesthetic because the midwives declared they could not feel pain during a contraction, young girls being slapped in the face for screaming too much, the blood, amniotic fluid and the smell...

After my first day I vowed to myself that there was no way that I would endure such a horrible ordeal.

Five years later, after immigrating to Australia I fell pregnant, and my immediate thoughts about delivery were caesarean section. This was purely on an emotional level as those images were still very vivid in my mind. As my pregnancy progressed and delivery inched closer, I started preparing my argument for caesarean section, thinking it would have to be airtight to win over my obstetrician. For me, pain was a major issue; I am not of the opinion that one needs to feel each contraction in order to call yourself a 'real woman' and if safe, effective pain relief is available then I want it. Thus, an epidural was a definite consideration, but I was living in a regional Queensland area where 24 hour access to epidurals was not readily available. Another important issue was

vaginal preservation; the possibility of a significant perineal tear with its sequelae was of concern. The higher incidence of utero-vaginal prolapse and incontinence to urine and faeces was also worrying. Having witnessed a number of these frightening complications firsthand, the risks involved were for me too high.



Psychiatry registrar Lauren Neppe, with sons Benjy and Zach, both delivered by caesarean section.

In my mind, the risks involved in a caesarean section, although not negligible, were far more acceptable than those involved in a vaginal birth. From the outset, I was not planning to have more than three children, and I felt that this was still an acceptable surgical risk. And one cannot overlook the convenience factor of a planned caesarean delivery, where you can pick the date, and make arrangements for family traveling from overseas to be there at the birth.

Once I had argued this all out in my mind, I broached it with my obstetrician, steeling myself for a hard sell, but was met surprisingly with understanding and support for my decision. I was a little taken aback as I had not been expecting such a response.

There were times before the birth that I did question my decision, and momentarily would ponder whether I would miss out on something important by not actually going through labour, but each time I would run through my original points of argument and still come to the same conclusion.

The delivery went ahead, as planned, and although it was quite strange to be a patient and be on the receiving end for a change, I really enjoyed the whole experience. The actual caesarean was fantastic; I had a spinal anaesthetic and so was able to enjoy the birth fully-conscious and pain-free, and it was in fact the most beautiful and miraculous experience.

I have had two wonderful birth experiences and do not regret having chosen surgery as my primary mode of delivery.

The only negative part, and one which I completely underestimated, was the post-operative pain, particularly in the first 24 hours. But I was home with my beautiful son by day three.

In fact, I enjoyed the experience so much that almost two years to the day, I decided to repeat the whole procedure and had a second son. The only difference the second time was that I had a spinal-epidural and so remained virtually pain free throughout the first 24 hours.

I have had two wonderful birth experiences and do not regret having chosen the surgical route as my primary mode of delivery.

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