

# 'Uncaring' staff added to pain of baby's death

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Safer births

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AN NHS consultant has described how the agony of his baby son's death was compounded by the callousness and lack of care shown by health service colleagues at a maternity unit.

Ranulph Hunter was just 12 days old when he died in early 2013 after delays to his delivery that meant it was not possible to try potential treatments for the brain damage he had suffered in the womb.

Ben Hunter, a consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon, said the concerns of his wife, Katie, were ignored as his son's condition deteriorated.

"What compounded this trauma was the uncaring attitude of the maternity services," he said.

"Katie presented at a London teaching hospital with a very significant obstetric complication and received only humiliation and no medical input of any value for over 10 hours. Ranulph had been quietly asphyxiating under their care all that time."

Katie was 37 weeks pregnant when she felt very unwell and went to the maternity department of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in London at about 11pm on December 21, 2012.

She says that after waiting for 40 minutes for a midwife to return from her break, she was assessed in a corridor and told

her condition was the result of dehydration.

Katie, 33, said one midwife rolled her eyes and mocked her by saying she "hated women who came in saying their baby hasn't moved all day".

She said a midwife also accused her of being irresponsible for coming to the hospital when suffering from diarrhoea, which the midwife claimed could have been the result of a virus and might have infected other patients.

When Katie explained that her husband was a doctor and had listened to the baby's heartbeat, she said the midwife replied: "Well, what are you worried about then? Clearly the baby isn't dead."

Hunter, 41, from southwest



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London, said: "What sort of human being, let alone health professional, would say that to someone?"

Despite feeling humiliated and frightened, Katie charmed the midwife into moving her to a triage room and carrying out further tests. Ranulph's foetal heart rate was found to be high and a doctor was called.

Katie was seen by junior doctors, including a registrar — the level below a consultant — at about 1am but they decided against carrying out an emergency caesarean section.

Katie said: "They just left me when all the registrar had to do was call the consultant. This is

the real problem. They do not have 24-hour consultant care. They are not in the building."

The five-hour delay between Katie's arrival at the hospital and a caesarean finally being performed meant potential treatment for Ranulph's brain damage was impossible. He died on January 3, 2013.

It was later found that Katie had suffered a placental abruption, a serious complication of pregnancy in which the placenta starts to come away from the womb wall.

The couple, who have two other sons, aged seven and five months, have been left devastated by their experience.

Katie, who struggled to return to work as a science teacher, has suffered anxiety and panic attacks and the couple both have flashbacks.

"It has just shaken everything. Having your baby die in your arms is not anything anybody wants to go through and I can confirm that this is worse than you could possibly imagine," Katie said.

Kate Cornelius, a medical negligence lawyer at Irwin Mitchell, said: "The Hunters have been devastated by the tragic death of Ranulph. The independent evidence we have obtained as part of the legal case is critical of the medical treatment provided by the maternity unit leading up to Ranulph's birth."

Lesley Watts, chief executive of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, said: "The trust reiterates its sincere sympathies to the family of Ranulph Hunter."

"The trust has carried out a thorough review of the circumstances of Mrs Hunter's delivery and lessons have been learnt from this case and actions taken to avoid similar events in future."

The harrowing case has emerged as The Sunday Times Safer Births campaign calls



Ben and Katie Hunter in hospital with Ranulph, who died after a delayed caesarean, and son Ollie

for action to achieve a 60% reduction in stillbirths and deaths of babies born soon after birth.

Experts believe this could be achieved by applying basic care guidelines on monitoring and intervention and the presence of a consultant obstetrician in

all large maternity hospitals every hour of every day.

The campaign also calls for earlier medical intervention to save babies or mothers at risk, better monitoring of babies' growth and heartbeat and greater communication with mothers to react to their

concerns – improvements that would have helped the Hunters. Official figures obtained by Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, show at least 3,500 babies are stillborn in Britain every year, more per head than in Poland, Croatia and Estonia.