



Bartosz Jaworski and Tracey Taylor with their son Kristian, who died after hospital staff insisted on trying a natural birth

## Caesarean savings 'put babies at risk'

Chris Smyth

Babies are at risk of dying because the NHS restricts caesarean sections to save money, a senior coroner has claimed.

Andrew Walker has written to the Department of Health demanding action after an inquest into the death of Kristian Jaworski, who died at five days old because he had been starved of oxygen during delivery.

Tracey Taylor, Kristian's mother, said that staff at North Middlesex University Hospital did not listen when she warned that she would need a caesarean section after finding out during a previous pregnancy that she had a narrow birth canal.

"I feel that I was treated like an over-anxious woman who was too frightened to give birth," she said.

When her labour ran into problems, a consultant obstetrician recommended

a caesarean section, but a more junior doctor decided that a birth using forceps would be possible. After an hour of failed attempts with the instruments, doctors carried out an emergency caesarean section, but Kristian later died.

"The cause of death is likely to have been asphyxia as a consequence of prolonged and extended instrumental delivery," Mr Walker wrote in his verdict. "There is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken."

He warned the Department of Health: "There was a presumption in favour of vaginal delivery based partly on cost that needed to be rebutted."

Cathy Cale, director of medicine at the hospital, denied that cost had been a factor in the decision. "We are very sorry for the tragic death of baby Kristian," she said. "We have accepted liability for Kristian's death because we accept we made mistakes."

"Our team took their decision to

continue with the natural delivery in this case for clinical reasons alone."

NHS figures show that vaginal deliveries cost the health service £1,985, while caesarean sections cost £3,781.

Alan Cameron, vice-president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: "When making decisions around childbirth, safety is always the principal focus, cost is never a consideration."

Ben Gummer, a health minister, said that Kristian's family had been "let down terribly". He added: "Treatment decisions in maternity care should always be made in full consultation with women. These should be based on a woman's individual clinical needs."

Maureen Treadwell, of the Birth Trauma Association, claimed there was an NHS cult of "normal" birth. "Many key figures have carved their careers on a mantra of 'intervention reduction' and 'promoting normality,'" she said.