



The greatest joy

How our maternity team saved mum Gemma's life after delivering baby Louis

Up until the very moment Gemma gave birth to her son Louis, she and her husband Oliver had experienced what most would consider a 'normal' pregnancy.

After deciding upon our midwife-led care option, Gemma and Oliver first visited The Portland Hospital at 30 weeks' gestation. They immediately felt the benefits of a maternity offering more suited to their needs, with Gemma enjoying the attention and time from the midwives and "The great flexibility with appointments - evening and weekend availability made it far easier for Oliver and myself."

This flexibility was matched by the personal care both felt from The Portland's midwife-led team. As Gemma fondly remembers, **"Every single midwife was so friendly, kind and welcoming. I never met one person at The Portland who didn't love their job. They care passionately about doing the very best for you."**

Calm upon arrival

Indeed, when Gemma's waters eventually broke at home that March Wednesday evening, the relative calm of her pregnancy led both her and Oliver to feel perfectly relaxed as they arrived at The Portland. At this stage, she remembers there was no reason to fear anything untoward. "Everybody was very relaxed. The overwhelming feeling for us at that point was one of calmness. We were happy and excited about meeting our baby soon."

Gemma had already been diagnosed as Group B Streptococcus (GBS) positive; a common type of bacterial infection in women, and one that can be harmful to babies in the womb if their mother's waters are broken for a long period before delivery. However, despite needing to take pre-planned antibiotics once she was in hospital, as she and Oliver lay in their private room, Gemma says it was more a case of sitting tight until Louis decided he was ready to join them. "It's a bit of a waiting game before you give birth - at one point we were having tea and biscuits."

A turn of events

After a period of waiting it was necessary to help speed up Gemma's contractions, and so her consultant induced her during the night. Whilst having the desired effect initially, the contractions soon became too painful for her to manage, to the point where she decided she wanted an epidural.

As Gemma points out, this was perhaps the first moment she and Oliver experienced slight nerves about their birthing experience. "I wasn't coping well with the pain, and at this point the excitement turned into tiredness and nerves. I was thinking - 'I'm actually scared now.' However, the resident obstetric anaesthetist and midwife were amazing and made me feel as calm as possible - particularly helpful considering I had to have an epidural needle inserted into my spine."

Gemma fights for her life after Louis is born

Unfortunately, the greatest drama was still to come. When the time finally arrived for Gemma to give birth to Louis the following morning, the risks were immediate. Whilst Louis was completely healthy on arrival, Gemma incurred a major obstetric haemorrhage, losing a life-threatening three and a half litres of blood as a result of internal bleeding.





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As the renowned team of Portland consultants and maternity midwives went into action, Gemma was fully aware of how drastic the events were becoming. "I genuinely did think I might die. I looked over at my husband holding my son, and thought I might never get to see them again. It really was quite traumatic."

Exceptional care in dramatic circumstances

Gemma was right. After losing so much blood, the split-second decisions of the medical team proved vital in stabilising her before she worsened any further. Karen Russell, Maternity Patient Safety Matron at The Portland Hospital, reflects on the urgency of Gemma's situation. "Her care was immediately transferred over to her dedicated consultant

obstetrician, where she was given medication to contract her uterus, before going on to have an emergency blood transfusion to replace the blood she had lost after giving birth to Louis."

Gemma was transferred to the Enhanced Maternity Critical Care Unit on the labour ward, where she received one-to-one midwifery care and was kept under close observation by the consultant obstetric and anaesthetic team throughout the entire 16 hours she remained there. During this time when Gemma needed to rest Louis was cared for in the maternity nursery, whilst Oliver was also able to sleep in a room specially made up for him by The Portland staff.

As things began to settle down, the next stage of Gemma's rapid recovery was nothing short of incredible. After giving birth to Louis and the alarming experience that ensued, Gemma, Oliver and their newborn baby were able to leave hospital several days later, with The Portland's consultant team satisfied Gemma had recovered suitably enough to return home with a care plan and the medication she required.

Looking ahead as a happy family

Six months on from Louis' birth, both Gemma and Oliver have had plenty of time to enjoy the life-changing period of starting a family, as well as taking advantage of The Portland's postnatal Women's Health physiotherapy and support.

With mother and baby both happy and healthy, Gemma looks back on her experience with fond memories –something to be admired all things considered. "They saved my life and my son's life, and gave me the happy family that I wanted. I would definitely give birth again at The Portland Hospital, the care was faultless."

