

Journalist Uses Medical Records to Investigate What Went Wrong During Child's Delivery

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After surviving a hospital encounter that nearly led to her own death and that of her unborn child, journalist Joy Victory spent \$400 to obtain hard copies of her medical records to make sense of what happened to her.

A healthcare news editor by trade, Victory explained in an interview with the Center for Health Journalism the series of mistakes that resulted in a near-fatally late diagnosis of preeclampsia.^{1,2} As a journalist, Victory used her encounter with what she describes as a “broken healthcare system” to write about high maternal mortality rates in the United States for an article in *Cosmopolitan*.³ In her interview with the Center for Health Journalism, however, Victory highlighted how healthcare documentation—or lack of it—can help recreate a timeline of medical decision making which individuals can use to prevent future breakdowns in care delivery.

After Victory delivered her child and both recovered from the ordeal, she describes how the post-traumatic stress she experienced made her wary of speaking with the providers who tended to her in the hospital, and how she instead chose to find out what happened to her solely through paper medical records, text message logs with her friends, and conversations with her husband. From her hospital she requested her prenatal chart, her emergency room triage chart, her daughter's NICU chart, and her post-partum care chart. When she looked carefully at her records she found several instances of clinicians using the copy-and-paste function to fill in inaccurate details of her care. She also learned that she switched hospital rooms seven times, which led to delays in the administration of vital medications and missed meals.

A disheartening takeaway from this experience, as illustrated in her medical charts, was that Victory “had to come to accept that the hospital wasn't looking at me as a whole person, nor as a mother-baby unit—just a combination of vital signs, lab work, symptoms, and medical and nursing orders. There wasn't going to be a narrative.”

The lesson for health information management professionals is to remember that everyone who requests records has very personal reasons for doing so. Making that process as painless as possible may very well be part of the healing process, as it was for Victory.

Notes

¹ Heisel, William. “[How medical records helped one journalist find out what went wrong during her daughter's birth.](#)” Center for Health Journalism. July 6, 2017.

² Heisel, William. “[Piecing together medical records revealed missed chances to intervene during scary delivery.](#)” Center for Health Journalism. July 12, 2017.

³ Victory, Joy. “[Why Are American Women Dying in Childbirth?](#)” *Cosmopolitan*. December 12, 2015.

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