

Parents' five-year ordeal of shuttling between hospitals with son who has cerebral palsy

ALISON SANDY THE COURIER-MAIL JUNE 04, 2013 12:00AM



HEARTACHE: Neil and Christine's five-year-old son Stephen now suffers from cerebral palsy. Source: The Courier-Mail

STEPHEN celebrated his fifth birthday over the weekend, but he wasn't able to enjoy birthday cake like a normal little boy.

His only food came via a nasal drip, which he'll most likely have to endure for the rest of his life.

Stephen was born healthy, despite being 12 weeks premature and a twin.

But he now has cerebral palsy after spending his first 102 days of life being transferred between Brisbane and Gold Coast hospitals because the latter could not handle the severity of his illness.

MUST READ: Babies in peril from shortage of hospital cots

(<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/sick-babies-in-peril-from-shortage-of-intensive-care-cots-at-queensland-hospitals/story-e6freoof-1226656499508>)

The problems began when his mother, Christine, whose water had broken, was turned away from Gold Coast Hospital because they didn't have the facilities to cater for such a premature birth.

She was taken to Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital where she had an emergency C-Section.



COMPLICATIONS: Brave little Stephen in hospital after birth.

At 32 weeks, Stephen was sent back to Gold Coast Hospital but developed a bowel disorder which meant he had to be transferred to Brisbane again for surgery.

Immediately after surgery he was fine, but before long he started suffering seizures.

"When I saw him he was shaking and his head was swollen. I kept asking the nurses what happened. He wasn't like that the day before," Christine said through tears. "So they asked the doctor to come and take a look and he said 'he'll be fine, they swell after surgery'. They said later he had a massive haemorrhage."

At 34 weeks, he needed surgery again - this time on his brain. But it was cancelled three times.

Stephen was eventually transferred again to Gold Coast Hospital and now spends his life going between Gold Coast, Royal Brisbane and Mater hospitals for treatment.

"For the first three years of his life, none of the hospitals were communicating with each other, and it was up to us to make sure we listened to what they were saying so we could pass it on," dad Neil said.

The family now lives in a housing commission home at Oxenford because Christine, formerly an aged care nurse, has to be with Stephen full-time plus care for four other children aged under 13.

Stephen's ongoing health problems have meant Neil can't hold down a full-time job.

Christine says it's also hard on the other children.

"They shiver every time an ambulance goes past," she said.

"It doesn't just affect Stephen - it affects the whole family.

"We're part-time parents to the other kids because we have to do so much with Stephen.

"It's hard because he was normal when he was born."

Maurice Blackburn medical negligence lawyer Sarah Atkinson is acting for Stephen in relation to a

compensation claim. She said the firm received about 90 calls a month from people in Queensland alleging medical negligence.

Health Minister Lawrence Springborg said he would not comment on individual cases.

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