

Woman Forced Into Violent Episiotomy Settles With Doctor

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Kimberly Turbin has settled the lawsuit against her obstetrician for forcing an episiotomy on her during labor. (Photo: Kimberly Turbin/Improving Birth)

A California woman who sued her obstetrician for assault and battery after a birth video that captured him giving her a forced episiotomy went viral has agreed to settle her case for an undisclosed amount.

Kimberly Turbin of Los Angeles gave birth to her son in 2013, having her perineum cut 12 times by her obstetrician during labor, despite her vocal protests. In 2015, with the help of both the national birth-advocacy organization Improving Birth and prominent civil-rights attorney Mark Merin, Turbin sued the doctor, Alex Abbassi; months later, Abbassi surrendered his medical license with a claim of “age-related cognitive defects,” a move that Turbin’s team called “tactical.”

But now, with the legal settlement, Turbin, a single mom, can really put the ordeal behind her.

“None of us could blame her for wanting this to be over,” Dawn Thompson of Improving Birth said in a statement about Turbin, released on Tuesday, explaining that continuing to push the case forward could have taken another three years. “She’d done a damn good job and it was beyond time to move on.”



Kimberly Turbin with her attorney, Mark Merin. (Photo: Improving Birth/Kimberly Turbin)

Thompson added, “Kimberly accomplished so much just by speaking out and sharing her story. The video has been viewed more than half a million times. Millions of people read her story in the many news articles written about the case. The doctor gave up his medical license and is no longer able to practice. Kimberly’s story has been shared with mothers, fathers, nurses, midwives, physicians, and more, even discussed during meetings of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. [She’s] done exactly what she’d set out to do — leave a mark.”

While details of the settlement, including the dollar amount, must remain private due to a nondisclosure agreement, Thompson said Turbin received enough to both “put a little away for her son’s education” and seek out the emotional support and counseling “she needs to heal.”

The video footage, filmed by Turbin’s sister in labor and delivery at Providence Tarzana Medical Center in California, captured Abbassi condescending to Turbin, a two-time sexual-assault survivor, while she labored on her back. Abbassi then made 12 audible snips to her perineum after Turbin could be heard telling him, “No, don’t cut me. No!” It prompted a huge outcry after it was posted to YouTube.

At the time that the lawsuit was filed, Merin told Yahoo, “The physician acted in total disregard of the patient’s interest — either because he practices backward medicine ... or because it was just heartless for some other reason.”

Turbin had called the lawsuit “a big step for women who have been silenced,” adding, “Every time I hear one of these stories about women being ignored when they complained about how they were treated in the hospital, it reminds me of why I’m doing this. It took a lot of people to get this far, but this is the proof that you can do something.”

In sharing the news about Turbin’s settlement on Tuesday, Thompson noted, “Her strength and courage in speaking out and pursuing action against her doctor will continue to make a difference for birthing people in the United States. We can’t wait to see what this strong, brave

woman will do next.”