A story tells more than its tale: women’s accounts of their Caesarean experience

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Caesarean section (CS) rates continue to escalate in Australia and over 30% of Queensland women currently experience birth by CS. More than 80% of women who experience CS have a repeat CS and less than 20% of QLD women who plan a vaginal birth after CS achieve one. Research regarding CS is prolific, but predominantly relates to risks, benefits, rates and mode of birth following a CS. Considerable investigation has focussed on maternal preference for CS and maternal involvement in decision-making for a CS.
A glut of opinion pieces saturate the medical literature, mainly focussed on the right of women to choose CS, and the ethical dilemma faced by obstetricians when a woman requests a CS in the absence of a medical indication. Yet despite the commonness of CS, women’s accounts of their CS experience remain conspicuously absent in the literature: almost no research has investigated what it is like for women to undergo a Caesarean. A telephone interview using a two-part questionnaire (structured and semi-structured) was used to explore 103 women’s experiences of CS. The aims of the study were to 1) discover why CS was performed, 2) explore the experience of undergoing CS surgery, and 3) to discover whether women’s preference for a subsequent birth was influenced by their CS experience. The focus of this presentation is the second aim of this project - women’s own accounts of their experience of CS.