

A.O.C. 16/6/08

From: Frank
Sent: Thursday, 12 June 2008 11:41 AM
To: Committee, FCHY (REPS)
Subject: Carers Inquiry

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS

I am a 70 year old male in relatively good health. I am a carer to my wife who has a severe disabling condition resulting from multiple infections arising from 22 procedures to her right leg resulting in the knee being fused and the leg shortened with a rod through the bone from hip to ankle. Due to the eight years of not being able to walk correctly her left knee and hip and back have all suffered. She is now in continual chronic pain requiring high dosages of drugs to give some small relief and she is wheel chair dependant. As her carer I do all cooking, washing, ironing housework etc. She needs assistance to dress and to get up out of a chair or bed and if unsupported is liable to fall.

As a result of this I have left my employment to provide full time care, thus depriving us of an income. I find that by not working my own personal image is low and I at times feel quite depressed. As we own our own home we can live on the pension but the additional expenses involved with caring such as having to have a large car to carry wheel chair and allow sufficient space in front of the passenger seat and door length to accommodate my wife's fused leg means additional cost for petrol. I need to take my wife out as often as possible to keep her spirits up. We can no longer afford to buy presents for our grandchildren, which affect my wife's feeling of uselessness.

It is difficult to go out to dinner, the pictures or indeed to visit friends as steps are near impossible to negotiate and to sit at a table or in a chair requires her leg, which then sticks straight out, to be supported, which my wife finds terribly embarrassing. She can not travel in taxis, buses or planes due to her fused knee, and trains only if she can reserve a specific seat with sufficient leg room.

It is difficult to suggest how my lot as a carer can be better supported. I cannot/will not leave my wife for overnight. My daughter lives locally and is a help but she has her own problems with a Type 1 diabetic 4 year old.

The current carers allowance is an insult considering the cost of caring if my wife had to fall back on community/Government support and I feel that the Government is taking advantage of me as a carer. It barely pays for the additional petrol to allow my wife to leave the house. Her wheelchair, a very basic model, cost \$1200 for which there is no Medibank rebate and my private fund (NHBS) only returns \$60. We have to retain expensive top cover in private funds to ensure that she is able to get treatment and hospitalisation as required, but the gap is still enormous, particularly for anaesthetists and this should be looked at. Luckily, her surgeons have always reduced her bill, but even then there is a substantial gap. She requires physiotherapy but that is not covered sufficiently by either Medibank or NHBS and always has a gap payment.

It would be nice if facilities existed for the carer and the cared for to be able to have a weeks respite together where there was someone to do the housework and cooking and give the carer a break at least from these chores but still not feel guilty about leaving a loved one in someone else's care.

More assistance to carers in the house cleaning/ironing/vacuuming side would be appreciated, as many carers are themselves elderly and in my case with having to support my wife and do these chores my own back is beginning to feel the strain and I am concerned that a time will be reached when my back will not allow me to care for my wife. Anything that can stall that off will be an advantage to all.

When we eventually reach a stage where I cannot care adequately for my wife we will need to sell our house and go into some support facility, but these are very expensive and appear to match their rates with what they can extract from their clients, so any increase in an allowance will normally mean an increase in cost of the facility. Perhaps if there was a greater control of fees charged and services provided this would assist. More support/independent living villages are required and perhaps the Government should provide more competition to the privately run facilities.

Thank you for accepting this submission

Yours faithfully

Frank