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Submission No. 555
(Inq into better support for carers)

TO: COMMITTEE SECRETARY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY, COMMUNITY, HOUSING & YOUTH.

DEAR SECRETARY

I WISH TO MAKE A SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY, HOUSING & YOUTH INTO BETTER
SUPPORT FOR CARERS.

HISTORY

MY NAME IS RALPH AND I HAVE BEEN A CARER FOR MY
WIFE OF 38 YEARS FOR 19 YEARS, ALTHOUGH ^{ONLY} BEING A REGISTERED
CARER SINCE 1996.

MY WIFE SUFFERED A HEAD TRAUMA ABOUT 19 YEARS AGO WHICH
RESULTED IN A BRUISED BRAIN. WE WERE TOLD THAT RECOVERY
COULD TAKE UP TO 2 YEARS. THE 2 YEARS DID NOT HAPPEN,
BUT CHRONIC FATIGUE (C.F.) AND OBSESSIVE COMPULSION DISORDER
(O.C.D.) DID, ALONG WITH A MYRIAD OF OTHER SIDE EFFECTS.

I BECAME A FULL TIME CARER IN ~~1996~~ 1996 WHEN IT BECAME
EVIDENT THAT SHE COULD NO LONGER PROPERLY CARE FOR
HERSELF BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

MY ROLE

BY THE TIME SHE WAS FINALLY DIAGNOSED HER HEALTH HAD
SUFFERED TO THE POINT WHERE SHE HAD VIRTUALLY NO MUSCLE OF
ANY STRENGTH LEFT IN HER BODY. HER LUNGS, ~~THROUGH~~ THROUGH
INACTIVITY WERE REDUCED TO ABOUT ONLY 30% OF FULL
CAPACITY. MY MAIN ROLE AT THIS STAGE WAS TO MAKE HER
WALK AND EXERCISE, DAY AFTER DAY AFTER MONTH AFTER YEARS.
THERE WERE MANY OTHER THINGS THAT HAD TO BE DONE FOR HER

BUT THERE IS ONLY SO MANY SHEETS OF PAPER YOU WOULD WISH TO READ.

ALTHOUGH HER HEALTH HAS IMPROVED OVER THE YEARS THE PERSON SHE ONCE WAS IS LOST FOREVER. THERE A 10 YEARS OF HER LIFE THAT SHE HAS LITTLE OR NO MEMORY OF.

my PROBLEMS

ASK ANY CARER OF A PERSON WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITIES AND THEY WILL TELL YOU THAT THEIR LIFE IS NOT THEIR OWN. THE DEMANDS THAT CAN BE MADE ON YOU SIMPLY TO TRY ^{AND} DEAL WITH WITH DAY TO DAY LIVING, WITH ALL THE FEARS, ANXIETIES AND OTHER ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS OF CARING FOR SOMEONE CAN BE EXTREME. I HAVE HAD ONE THAKFULLY BRIEF BREAKDOWN AND HAVE COME VERY CLOSE TO A SECOND. I HAVE ALSO RECENTLY DEVELOPED A MILD HEART CONDITON, WHICH I DO, QUITE HONESTLY, BLAME IN PART THE LENGTH OF TIME I HAVE BEEN UNDER STRESS. WE HAVE ALMOST NO SOCIAL LIFE DUE TO MY WIFE'S O.C.D., IN FACT LAST YEAR WAS THE FIRST TIME WE WERE ABLE TO EAT A MEAL OUTSIDE OUR OWN HOME FOR MANY YEARS.

My UPSIDE

DURING THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS I HAVE ATTENDED TWO RETREATS ORGANIZED BY CARERS S.A. THESE OUTINGS OR SESSIONS OR WHATEVER NAME YOU CHOOSE, HAVE HELPED ME IMMENSELY BY MAKING ME REALIZE THAT I AM NOT THE ONLY ~~PERSON~~ PERSON THAT HAS FELT THE ~~LOVELY~~ LONELINESS, ANGER AND FRUSTRATION THAT SEEMED TO HAVE BECOME A "NORMAL" WAY OF LIFE FOR ME. BY TALKING AND INTERACTING WITH OTHER CARERS IT ALSO PREVENTED A SECOND BREAKDOWN. GATHERINGS SUCH AS THIS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED BY ALL STATE GOVERNMENTS ON A REGULAR AND CONTINUED THEME. ALL CARERS NEED COMPANIONSHIP FROM TIME TO TIME TO BE ABLE TO DISCUSS ISSUE THAT ONLY OTHE CARERS CAN UNDERSTAND

HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS HELP?

BEFORE MY WIFE WAS EVENTUALLY DIAGNOSED WITH C.F. AND O.C.D. BY A NATUROPATH, SHE WAS TREATED WITH INDIFFERENCE AND EVEN SCORN BY DOCTORS WHO TREATED HER. SHE WAS CONTINUALLY TOLD THAT SHE WAS DEPRESSED AND NEEDED MEDICATION, HER PLEAS THAT SHE WAS NOT DEPRESSED, BUT ILL, WERE IGNORED. I FEEL THAT IF THE DOCTORS HAD TREATED HER WITH MORE COMPASSION WE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD SO MUCH ANGUISH IN OUR LIVES.

BEFORE BECOMING ELIGIBLE FOR A DISABILITY PENSION MY WIFE HAD TO HAVE A SESSION WITH 2 PSYCHIATRISTS. THE FIRST WAS NOT REALLY INTERESTED, AND SEEMED TO LIKEN HER ~~PROBLEMS~~ PROBLEMS WITH AN ALCOHOLIC HE SAW ON A REGULAR BASIS, OR OF A SEXUAL NATURE BECAUSE OF HER FEAR OF CONTAMINATION, WHICH IS THE TYPE OF O.C.D. SHE SUFFERS FROM.

THE SECOND WAS JUST PLAIN IGNORANT.

I REALIZE ATTITUDES ARE CHANGING, BUT MORE STUDY SHOULD BE SUPPORTED BY GOVERNMENTS, STATE & FEDERAL TO COMBAT MENTAL ILLNESS. A LOT OF CARERS DO NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES AS CARERS BUT FEEL THEY ARE DOING "THE RIGHT THING" OR THAT "IT'S WHAT I HAVE TO DO" OR "IT'S MY DUTY". THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEIR LIFESTYLE OR HEALTH ~~SHOULD~~ SHOULD SUFFER TO THE POINT WHERE ONE DAY THEY MAY FIND THEMSELVES NEEDING CARE.

ALL CARERS NEED SUPPORT AND COMPANIONSHIP FROM TIME TO TIME, TO THIS END I WOULD LIKE TO SEE GOVT. BACKED CAMPAIGNS TO MAKE ALL CARERS AWARE OF ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE FUNDING FOR ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS CARERS SA. (IN SA) INCREASED SO THAT CARERS CAN BE BROUGHT ~~TO~~ TOGETHER ON A REGULAR BASIS FOR GROUP ACTIVITIES.

WE SEE MANY ~~AD~~ ADVERTS ON T.V. FOR DONATIONS TO ORGANISATIONS THAT NEED MONEY FOR RESREARCH INTO ~~ALL~~ ALL TYPES OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ILLNESSES, BUT WHO IS IT THAT CARES FOR A LOT OF

PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM THESE ILLNESSES? NEXT TIME YOU SEE ONE OF THESE ADS. ON T.V, LOOK FOR A CARER, I DOUBT YOU WILL SEE ONE. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE DOCTORS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE ENCOURAGE CARERS TO JOIN CARER GROUPS FOR THEIR OWN WELL-BEING.

SOMETIMES WE CAN FORGET TO LOOK AFTER OURSELVES UNTIL IT IS ALMOST TOO LATE. BELIEVE ME, I KNOW, BEEN THERE, DONE THAT !!

I SINCERELY THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE MY FEELING ON THIS ISSUE