1/06/2005

Dear Sir

Regarding access to health services for people with mental illness I would like to briefly describe what happened with my older sister. My sister died three years ago at the age of 44 from a pneumonic embolism. This appears to have been the end result of weight gain and the effect of medication she had been prescribed by her GP and a psychiatrist she had been seeing. While it seems likely that my sister did have some form of mental illness is also clear that she was distressed and unhappy about a number of major life issues. She spoke to me about having been unable to access non-medical forms of treatment i.e. counselling or psychological treatment. My sister was living alone in a State where she had few or no friends and no family. She was no longer working as a result of erratic behaviour associated with her condition.

It appears to me that her death was an end result of multiple system failures by the medical system. Two key problems in my sister's case appear to have been:

a.) The extent of her isolation and due to her illness her unwillingness to seek support.

b.) Negative effects associated with the range of medications she was taking e.g. severe weight gain.

Neither of these issues seems to have been adequately identified or managed by the healthcare professionals she was in contact with. I would like to recommend the following:

1.) Improved overall management of prescriptions to people in similar situations who may not manage their own medications well.

2.) Improved medical health screening of people receiving psychiatric medication. Especially those in at risk situations such as living alone and or with limited social support.

3.) Ensuring that people presenting to GP's in similar situations are offered access to appropriate non-drug treatments i.e. psychological consultation as well as simply providing medication.

Yours Sincerely

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