

Sent: Wednesday, 27 April 2005 11:13 AM

To: Mental Health (SEN)

Subject: 050427 "Inquiry into Mental Health Issues.

Att: Committee Secretary,

"As human beings, we are all "creatures of habit". This habitual way of seeing, listening, thinking and doing is in us all. Additionally, we usually only ever abuse the rights of those we see as having less power than we have. These flaws exist to a greater or lesser extent in all of us, and often cost the most disadvantaged and disabled in our community their right to natural justice. The technical term of this practice is called "defensive reasoning"

I make this submission to the committee both as a consumer and a carer.

As a consumer with a mental illness, I have been unable to work for several years and at the age of 60, given my current unstable health status, am realistic enough to know that my days in work are over. As a result I receive a Disability Pension. However, I am one of the lucky ones in that I have private health cover at the moment, a psychiatrist I am able to trust and one of the few that bulk bills. I do 4hrs per week on a HelpLine for carers and people with Mental Health Issues. To date I have been hospitalized on three occasions. I have been able to receive this high quality of treatment at short notice purely on the basis of my having private cover. Given our dwindling financial situation I am afraid that I shall be unable to maintain my current private health cover and will become another burden on the Public System that seems unable to cope with people in my position, here I refer specifically to the need to be able to access a safe hospital environment at short notice, and not be fobbed off. After all is said and done - if I had a broken leg - I might have to lie on a gurney of some hours but would not be sent on my merry way to find another hospital.

As a carer, and indeed given my experiences in dealing with both carers and consumers on the help line I see that very little has changed in the past 15 years or so since my son became ill. Without elaborating on all of the issues I shall confine my comments to the following points.

a.. Financial resources committed to provide care for those with a Mental illness are woefully inadequate and the system relies primarily on family members to provide the "Care" their relative needs.

b.. There is a distinct lack of supported accommodation, employment (refer to Peter Costellos comments on SBS Dateline) family and social support services both in our high population areas and rural areas.

c.. There seems to be very little consideration given to police training in dealing with someone with a Mental Illness, this being reinforced given that latest tragic events here in Victoria.

d.. One of the greatest challenges facing this Country is the lack of education in the de-stigmatising of Mental Illness. I am finding more and more that in taking calls for help we are dealing with the problems created by dual diagnosis, ie Drug Abuse and Mental Illness. That resources are stretched to the point of becoming ineffective.

e.. One of the insidious aspects of a Mental Illness is the withdrawal from, family, friends and life. There is very little in the way of outreach to consumers. Having a Mental Illness is a very lonely existence, particular for people living on their own, and or in prison - where many with this illness reside having fallen foul of the legal system.

f.. As a carer, one of the most frustrating aspects of having a family member with a mental illness is the unwillingness of the clinicians to discuss, treatment, medication, progress (or otherwise) et al. Privacy rights should go out of the window when parents and carers see their sick family member spiraling out of control and being completely impotent to do anything to stem fall and sadly in some cases the suicide that for many is the ultimate outcome.

At this time there is a plethora of agencies out there receiving Government Funding and researching the "Problem" How many times do we need to re-invent the wheel. As a Carer in order to take out the frustration of being passed from pillar to post we should have a system of well publicized one stop shops in the health areas where Carers and Consumers can get information, support, respite, accommodation, hospital both for long and short terms.

At this time the reality is that there are a significant number of people sitting around tables and talking, what is lacking are people willing to come out from behind their desks, dropping their "Defensive Reasoning" and getting out into the real world of Mental Illness to have an impact and make a difference to the hundreds of families that are really hurting and at their wits end.

Regards