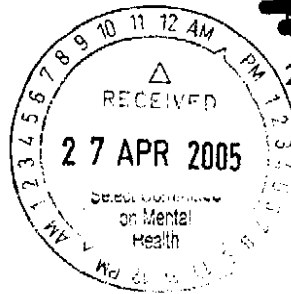


[REDACTED]

Committee Secretary,  
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health,  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



21 : 04 : 05

Dear Madam,

I write in reference to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health. My family includes a daughter who has Schizophrenia and a son who recently suicided from a Major Depression. I wish to make the following submissions.

Some time ago, my son, as a teenager, had an anger-rage and was head-butting the furniture through the house. Extremely worried, I called the police. A large number of police came, fully armed and surrounded the house. When I spoke to one policeman and said I was worried about my son's state of mind, he replied "No, it's just the drugs". When I consider the dangers inherent in the use of firearms, I would not have called them had I known they would be armed. I believe the police need more training into mental illness.

After 10 years working as a printer and still using Cannabis, this same son visited his G.P. and was told he had severe depression but, when I, later, spoke to him about my son, he said he considered him too optimistic to treat at this time. He hanged himself shortly after this - one year ago - at the age of 26. Community-based research has shown that up to half of people with mental illness consult a helping agency within the previous week. While the G.P. appears to be a reasonable person, some people will not go to mental health clinicians and go instead to their local doctors. G.P.'s need to have more expertise in mental illness.

When my daughter, with Schizophrenia, changed her medication, she had no monitoring. As a result she ended up misusing it and became psychotic. I took her to our nearest hospital. She was seen at the emergency department of the general hospital, after contacting the C.A.T.T. There was a psychiatric section next door. It seemed obvious to me that it would have been more suitable to treat her there rather than distressing other patients for hours while she waited to be seen by a psychiatrist. My daughter when well, is extremely co-operative. However, on this, her first occasion in a hospital, and in a psychosis, she lashed out at a nurse, (only mildly), who tried to force her to drink a cup of charcoal, which I, myself, would have resented. The staff were very annoyed, as the nurse was pregnant, and threatened to have my daughter charged with a criminal offence. It occurred to me that I, too, had once been pregnant and this was the result of that pregnancy. When a psychiatric team eventually arrived, her treatment assumed some normality. The psychiatrist sectioned her and the psychiatric nurses were sympathetic. However, she was taken by ambulance to a hospital in Epping, (much further away), for which we are zoned.

People changing medication should be more carefully supervised. It is no use nurses talking rationally to mentally ill persons when they are psychotic. I am certain my daughter would have presented no real threat in any case. I had to get a taxi to take my daughter to the first hospital. The hospital in Epping would have required an ambulance. Zoning rules need to be reviewed.

I hope these three instances will highlight some of the needs for change within the Mental Health System.

Yours sincerely,  
[REDACTED]