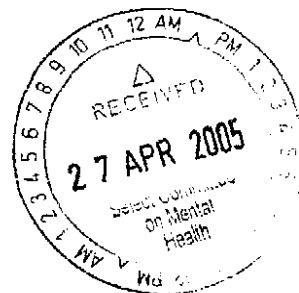


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Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



CC: The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Minister for Health.
Ms Julia Gillard, Shadow Minister for Health.

The Chair, Senate Select Committee,

Here is our family submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, chaired by Senator Lyn Allison. Our submission concerns two elements of your terms of reference:

- **After-hours crisis services; and**
- **Co-ordination and delivery of services.**

After-hours crisis services:

We demand that there be a requirement for all Area Health Services to have an after-hours crisis service; let's call it a CATT (Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team). The CATT could either be managed by government health services, or outsourced to private enterprise.

The essential elements of the CATT are:

- Sustained resourcing, sufficient for the client-base.
- CATT members are properly trained, and are willing to attend all crises, even "non-gentrified" ones where violence and/or drug use is an issue and in conjunction with appropriately-trained police officers if necessary.
- Consistency and clarity of CATT responses, independent of the interpretation of individual practitioners, with focus on the needs of the mentally ill person and the family rather than on the needs of the CATT itself and its perceived safety.

Whilst living in the ACT, we experienced excellence from the local CATT which attended our home when our daughter was in a prodromal state and had locked herself in her room late at night. As a result of the CATT dedication, a humiliating and extremely distressing family situation was brought under control without need for hospitalization or the stigma of well-meaning but untrained police presence in our neighbours' presence.

Co-ordination and delivery of services:

Hospitals should always review and treat the physical state of mental health patients with the same concern and promptness with which they treat the mental illness. This is wholistic patient care.

In 2000, Liverpool Hospital was seriously delinquent in its wholistic care of our daughter whilst she was in the Mental Health Unit to the degree that only by threatening the hospital with media exposure were we, as her parents and carers, able to get her transferred to a medical ward for her physical deficiencies (including severe malnutrition) to be treated and which in fact saved her life. This was, and is, unacceptable, and in response to our detailed complaint to the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC), the HCCC in 2002 issued 44 recommendations to the hospital covering many aspects of mental health.

Yesterday, 20 April 2005, we received evidence that a mental health patient in Liverpool hospital with a shattered shoulder was denied physiotherapy, denied a discharge plan, and her carer/family was not involved in her treatment plans or discharge planning.

So despite the following HCCC recommendations, mental health care has not advanced since our experience in 2000:

5.3.3 The clinical divisions of the Liverpool Health Service are to develop protocols that ensure timely assistance and support to the MHU staff in reviewing the physical state of patients in the MHU, and negotiating transfer to a medical ward if necessary.

5.4.1 Enhanced training for staff on clinical assessment including: monitoring of physical and cognitive state, signs of delerium, particularly in a physically compromised patient with a psychotic illness.

5.4.1 Implement formal discharge planning involving the patient, carers and community case managers.

5.5.1 Routine inclusion of carers in treatment plans and discharge plans.

Additionally, it is unacceptable that recommendations from HCCC inquiries (and indeed from all government-sanctioned inquiries – inquiries which are commissioned because of perceived deficiencies, and which assemble information enabling the inquirer to become the specialist if not the authority) may carry no more weight with a hospital than mere suggestions without any obligation that they be acted upon or implemented.

Yours sincerely

