

TO IAN HOLLAND

SECRETARY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH.

AUSTRALIAN SENATE.

Dear Secretary,

A close relative has had schizophrenia for twenty years. Luckily when he was first psychotic he was admitted to a wonderful psychiatric hospital where patients stayed on average for four to six weeks. It was a real haven.

They dressed off a morning and attended classes in relaxation, English, art and music and had recreational activities and sport both indoors and outdoors.

They had their own separate rooms with private shower and toilet.

Excellent meals were provided. They sat at tables in a lovely dining room where each was given their medication before the meal was served.

Those clients further along the road to recovery looked after the few comers they returned to the community, stabilized on medication, and knew that they could return for help if things deteriorated.

Like all the other psychiatric hospitals it was closed. The land was too valuable. The money for the sale was promised to be used for psychiatric care. It wasn't and closures are

Still happening

Can you imagine Public Hospitals for the physically ill being closed without any replacements and patients left to fend for themselves - not likely.

For a while after the closure of this wonderful haven psychiatric nurses visited patients once a fortnight and were available for contact each week day.

They have been replaced by social workers who are not psychiatrically trained but are dedicated and do a good job and are there for the needy to turn to which is more than many others have.

There are a few beds at a Public Hospital much further away with a stay of a few days.

The national mental health budget is only 7% of the total health budget.

Many mentally ill are homeless on the streets, in crisis shelter or in hostels many of which are being closed because of the preposterous rise of State Government land taxes in Victoria.

All Governments are to blame including the Senate. Nobody cared when they were abandoned - no votes there.

I wrote to many members of Parliament when the closure was first mooted. The then Federal Minister of Health did not even reply.

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Recently a young police Officer doing his duty was shot and died because of Government's callous attitude with the mentally ill.

Many mentally ill have also been shot and killed by police. This should not be a police situation. Patients should have had somewhere to be treated before things became so bad.

By their initial training police receive less than four hours training re mental illness. Instead of money spent on inquiries - spend it where it is needed - on and for those who are psychotic.

Psychiatric nurses who had spent 15-20 years or more working in psychiatric hospitals were just thrown on the scrap-heap.

Those with a mental illness must have 24/7 supported accommodation. Funding must be found for this and for trained people to oversee this accommodation with support for every psychiatric patient immediately they become psychotic. We live in hope.