

From: Roslyn Robertson [Roslyn.Robertson@wrhs.org.au]  
Sent: Thursday, 12 May 2005 3:04 PM  
To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)  
Subject: submission

Dear Senator Allison,

I am the Carer Consultant with Mental Health in Wodonga and I met with you when you were here last month. Rather than address the terms of reference, I am just going to tell you , from my experience with carers on a day to day basis, what their issues are. We have recently had meetings with our local and state politicians so I am very much aware of the needs in this area.

1. Carers want recognition for the job they do. This could be either financially or in the form of provision of more respite hours. Many carers are not able to work because of their caring role. Carer suffer in many ways. Physically due to lack of rest and inadequate time for self care, mentally due to ongoing stress and the roller coaster ride that is mental illness, STIGMA, financially as stated above, relationship breakdowns due to conflict around how to "treat" the unwell person , socially as they withdraw from activities because of exhaustion or fear of being judged.

2. Carers need to be listened to and their experience validated as an important tool to be used by clinicians and other "professionals" in planning the treatment . The chief psychiatrists guidelines in Vic have just been released and go some way to "forcing " clinicians into involving families.

3. Carers want to be able to see some hope for their relative/friend and for this to occur there needs to be much more offered in the way of psychosocial rehabilitation.

In this area we have approx 24,000 young people, one quarter of whom may be unwell at any one time. We have ONE young peoples' program which caters for 20 people at any one time!! Not enough. There is research based evidence from the U.K to show that psychosocial rehab together with family involvement dramatically reduces the incidence of relapse.

4. Carers are fed up with having to wait until their unwell person becomes so unwell before getting treatment. The answer to this would be early intervention in the form of a place where clients could go when they first start to become unwell so as to reduce the likelihood of admission to an acute setting. There is also a need for specialized clinics for client who have one of the high prevalence/low acuity illnesses such as depression and anxiety. The G.P's are not skilled enough and don't have adequate time and the Mental Health Services are mandated to deal with "serious" mental illness only. This is a huge gap in the system.

5. Carers want somewhere for their unwell person to go after discharge before coming home to them. Post acute rehab just doesn't exist in this area so the client comes home still quite unwell in many cases and has nothing to do( no psychosocial rehab ) and the care is expected to "manage" them often with little or no contact from the case manager "due to privacy". What a load of Bollocks!! Sorry but this is probably the main issue. Carers being shut out of the system and then when things go wrong being asked to pick up the pieces.

5. Carers want more support programs/education for their other children(siblings of the unwell person). This is an arera that is totally neglected. I cannot find one single support group for siblings/friends of other young people who have mental illness. There are web sites/ some books and individual counselling but that's not the same as being able to "hang out" with kids who are going thru the same as they are.

6. There needs to be more Consumer /Carer consultants and those already in place need more hours. Looking after the "grass roots " needs of carers is a full-time job on some days, let alone trying to advocate, find gaps in the system, try to fill those gaps, promote carers needs, undertake projects, deal with carers grief and loss, educate clinicians, seek out resources, AND instill HOPEFULNESS is too much for one person.

because, guess what I haven't had the time to do it until now , but at least I've had my say! Thanks for reading this and I look forward to seeing you again.

Ros Robertson