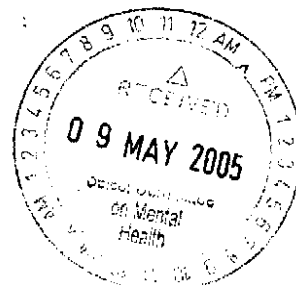


[REDACTED]
5 May 2005

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



Dear madam/sir

I am making this submission to tell you my experience and make some suggestions which would help other people in the future.

In summary, I was diagnosed with major depression and anxiety after my employer ignored my back injury at work. My depression was made worse by the way the insurer dealt with my workers' compensation claim.

I consider that employers and insurers should treat workplace injuries seriously. If they treated injured employees with respect and helped them receive treatment at an early stage, most employees would be able to get back to work sooner. Fewer employees would go on to develop depression and be off work for long periods. This would save employers money in the long run.

Supervisory staff, managers and employees in all workplaces, including insurers, need more education and training about mental illness. This might decrease workplace harassment of people with mental illness and reduce their feelings of alienation.

Brief history

I was a hard-working and loyal employee as a mechanic for 20 years, doing my apprenticeship with the same employer as well. I had no mental illness during that time.

After 20 years, I unfortunately suffered a back injury at work and complained of severe pain. However I kept working because I didn't know what I should do and I felt guilty if I went on sick leave. I feel the employer did not take my injury seriously. I told them I could not lift heavy weights because of the severity of my pain but they continued to give me jobs which involved heavy lifting. After continuously doing my best for two years, although in constant pain, I finally could do it no longer and broke down. I was diagnosed with major depression with anxiety attacks by my doctor and I was off work for five months.

I then started back at work with my employer on light duties but my depression continued. Some of the employees antagonised me because they thought I was

"bludging". My case was referred to my employers' insurer and the insurer made all dealings with my employer very difficult. The insurer arranged numerous doctor's appointments for me which were traumatic because I was feeling very vulnerable due to my depression and anxiety. I felt that they did not believe me and that they were interrogating me.

I found it extremely difficult to even open mail from my employer and their insurer so I had it redirected to my very understanding GP. Six years later I am still suffering depression and anxiety and I cannot work at all. I am still dealing with the insurer and even now I cannot directly deal with their mail. I feel continually anxious about being called up by their doctors to review my case, not because I am hiding something but because I feel they are ruling my life. I still have constant pain in my back, I am very limited in what I can do and I feel I have lost everything. I am only 41, I have most of my life ahead of me but I feel have nothing to look forward to.

I repeat my suggestions here:

- employers and insurers should treat workplace injuries seriously to prevent employees from developing depression: this means treating injured employees with respect and helping them by early intervention and treatment of their injury
- supervisory staff, managers and employees in all workplaces, including insurers, need more education and training about mental illness so they can deal better with employees who have a mental illness
- there should also be much more education and training about mental illness for the whole community to reduce the stigma of mental illness.

Yours sincerely

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