

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUBMISSION 2005:**

What is wealth? Is it purely an economic commodity? For me, there are many forms of wealth that go beyond material possessions. If one doesn't attend to all of forms of wealth, I believe that a person will live a hollow and meaningless life.

Money is important to live a comfortable life – we all need to eat, to have shelter over our head etc. But that is just one form of wealth. One must also have relationship wealth – that is feeling a connection with others. How many people with mental illness have this wealth? How many are still connected to family and friends? How many are surrounded by a strong loving and accepting community? How many are not stigmatized and shunned by society?

One must also have physical wealth. What have you got if you do not have good health – mental and physical? With all the money in the world, all you can ultimately be is the richest person in the graveyard. Who wants that? You cannot buy good health- but with some assistance, your health and health needs can be improved. All one needs is a government that is sensitive and aware of the health needs of the mentally ill. Sounds so simple – yet somewhat impossible if we look at the current legislation and awareness surrounding the status of the mentally ill and their real needs. Reality paints a tragic and very sorry picture - amazing in a first world, so called sympathetic and educated country.

Another form of wealth is adventure wealth. This kind of wealth is about feeling a sense of passion within your heart and wealthy in terms of the adventures you experience as you travel through your life. How many mentally ill can be filled with that passion? Yes, many can talk of their experiences and daily adventures – how many of these are positive, rewarding and inspiring? Is being turned away from hospital when you are psychotic because there are no beds a good, learning experience? Is being locked up in a police van because you are so psychotic that you are causing a disturbance and making people uneasy, a good feeling? Must do well for creating a positive self-esteem and instilling hope in a failing, insensitive system.

Finally, to be authentically wealthy each of us must try to create psychic wealth. The strongest need is for the human heart to live for something that is important and often more important than ourselves. So, to the government, lasting happiness can only come from what we give to our fellow humans – those around us as opposed to what we receive. **I ask you, how the average mentally ill consumer can give to community and others, when they have nothing to give themselves. Do mentally ill consumers have a cause that is more important than them?**

If we turn to hard facts, then what is it that I am asking?

Because of changes in legislation, both nationally and internationally, institutions and state mental hospitals have been closed and replaced by what is called “**community – based care**”. Furthermore, **the number of psychiatric wards in private and government hospitals has declined too**. The result is that there are a decreasing number of beds, either in private or public facilities, that are able to provide days or weeks of intensive supervision, medication and treatment of the most seriously mentally ill. There are **too few beds in which to fit seriously ill people** – even if they are suicidal or homicidal.

**All people with mental disorders require ongoing access to a full range of treatment and rehabilitation services to lessen the impairment and disruption produced by their condition.** A large percentage of this population requires hospitalization and some even require long-term institutional care. Unfortunately, there are not enough community –based treatment services available, nor enough – if any, long term, appropriate housing options for those disabled by mental disorders.

Many people with a mental illness need client management and case management opportunities, housing options, and long-term follow-up and support services. The importance of supportive services, meaningful daily activity in the community (including

work), and access to therapy can provide the framework necessary to promote easier living for those with mental illness.

With the mass exodus into the community that deinstitutionalization brought, one needs to understand the reactions and tolerance of the chronically mentally ill to the stresses of the community. Also, one must determine what has become of the mentally ill without state hospitals and why. There is evidence to suggest that many of the severely mentally ill are homeless.

**In the midst of extremely valid concerns about the shortcomings and anti-therapeutic aspects of state hospitals or institutions, these places fulfilled certain essential functions for the chronically and severely ill.** Although imperfect, institutions did provide respite and sanctuary from the pressure of the world, within which most of these patients were unable to cope. Furthermore, these institutions provided such services as medical care, patient monitoring, respite for the patient's family and a social network for the patient as well as food and shelter and needed support and structure.

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