

Submission to Senate Select Committee on Mental Health May 2005

I am the mother of a daughter who has had many mental illness/disorder diagnoses over a period of approximately 22 years. She has been the victim of the NSW Mental Health Service and the NSW Correctional Health Service for over sixteen years. Both organisations have let her and her family down significantly.

We now live in rural NSW however prior to moving to this area, lived in Sydney. The care and treatment is the same as far as I can see, no matter where in NSW you reside. It is an uncaring, under-funded and understaffed system. NSW, as the most populated state in Australia should be leading the way, instead they are dragging the chain and the people of NSW are suffering because of it.

My daughter is now thirty years old and still no closer to getting the help or support she as a human being deserves and should be able to expect.

A few of the diagnoses mentioned by the government authorities are: psychiatrically ill, post traumatic stress disorder; self harmer; suicidal; major depression and borderline personality disorder. The most recent diagnosis I have was that there is nothing wrong with her. Is it any wonder one can not cope with life?

The government systems have let her down, and her family, who have been there to pick up the pieces when she falls down. I can go back as far as the late 1980's when one state psychiatrist recommended psycho-therapy (she was a state ward then). This was never carried out or investigated by the carers of my daughter and I didn't know about it until I gained access to the reports some years later.

As a mother it has been and is a heart wrenching exercise to see a loved one go through what my daughter has been through and to hear and see the cries for help go unnoticed or dismissed as being 'attention seeking'. There is barely a patch of unmarked skin on her arms or neck where she has slashed herself or attempted hanging. Not to mention the times when GP's have prescribed valium which is ingested in one go. How easy it is to go 'Dr Shopping'. Education is needed all round.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is as I understand, a difficult thing to diagnose, but it can be done and it can be treated according to a Psychiatrist in Victoria. He recommends psycho-therapy and a mild medication for depression and anxiety which is part of BPD. He also states that many mental health clinicians dismiss people with BPD as being 'trouble makers'. What a sad indictment on our society. Having seen the NSW Mental Health professionals in action I can well understand how he came to make that statement.

These people are not trouble makers, but are desperately 'troubled' and they need help before it is too late.

I would also like to know how so many diagnoses are given for the same person, I understand that many of the above I mentioned go hand in hand with Borderline

Personality Disorder, so why put other labels on to that person? Add all those together and what you are presented with is a very confused human being who is unable to cope with life and all she wants is to end it so she can have some peace, which is something my daughter has not experienced since she about seven years old. As a mother, who can do very little other than fight the systems and be there to offer support and love, it is very difficult.

Recent studies show that there are two percent of our population who suffer from BPD, seventy-five percent of whom are female. It is often developed following a trauma or abuse. Surely these two percent deserve the help of professionals and some empathy.

Please help these people, they should not be allowed to become another suicide statistic. Everything should be done to help them. They are confused and continually cry out for help. Please listen to their cries and don't just dismiss them as attention seekers or trouble makers whether they are incarcerated or not.

The other side of the coin is the effect BPD has on the family. In my case, it has been devastating. In some cases, it has alienated family members. Some will say 'oh she is naughty'. She is thirty years of age for goodness sake. The community needs to be educated as do the mental health clinicians. BPD sufferers are not naughty; they are victims who are suffering intolerably.

My other concern is that the lack of information, due to the privacy laws, given to parents. I know in our case, my daughter does not comprehend instructions or the information passed on to her. At one stage, I contacted the Guardianship Tribunal regarding this and was told as the mother, I was her legal guardian and should be informed. The reality is that it does not happen.

I have found out on numerous occasions that my daughter has been on life support; however I was usually advised well after the event. These incidences have occurred whilst within the NSW Mental Health system and the NSW Correctional Health Service. This is not good enough, and shows a lack of respect for family members who would want to 'be there'.

The unfortunate scenario of all of this is that as a parent, I am prepared for the attempted suicides to become a reality. I would like to think I was wrong, but when one attempts so often, the brain becomes slower with each attempt. She will succeed, that is about the only thing I am certain about, because I cannot see the NSW Government waking up in time to prevent it.

It is time the NSW Mental Health system and the NSW Correctional Health Service come out of the dark ages and start helping the many people within this state who do not have a voice.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my thoughts on the NSW Mental Health System. It is appreciated and I can only pray that something good comes out of the enquiry.