

Pam Perrott

26th May 2005



Attention: Committee Secretary

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

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to comment about issues relating to privacy and confidentiality when dealing with Mental Health.

My mother committed suicide in 1966, when it was very much a taboo subject and she was prescribed medication, however the local country doctor did not really alert the family to fact that she may have had suicidal tendencies.

One would hope for better and open communication in the 21st century, but parents and close relatives or carers are often not informed about the fragility of a loved one's mental health, or changes in medication which could have serious consequences.

I was on the Board of Youth Focus for nearly five years and this was sometimes a problem. Counsellors dealing with suicidal clients were also not informed by medical professionals about clinical issues that may cause some dangerous changes in behaviour.

For the last four year I have been a Community Liaison Representative for the Perth Coastal Division of General Practice.

There are many issues raised at our meetings in relation to ridiculously strict privacy laws that are having a negative effect on patients and the communication between different medical service providers. I am also the Mental Health representative for this group and the Coordinator of the Mental Health Program is not even allowed to know which doctors in the division are qualified to send patients to this very worthwhile subsidised program.

Obviously there needs to be some control, so that everyone is treated with respect and that their privacy is guaranteed. However I do believe that it is very important to save lives and improve everyone's mental and physical health. If this means informing those who obviously care for people who are unwell, they have a right to know how they can help them, especially when they are paying all their bills. Medical Professionals and families need to work together to improve mental and physical well-being, as the time given by psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors is very minimal compared to the attention and care given by parents.

I hope you will give this matter serious consideration.

Yours faithfully

Pam Perrott