

Att. Ian Holland
SENATE ENQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH

Could you please look into the possibility of standardising mental health laws throughout Australia.

The situation, as it currently stands, is that a person diagnosed with a serious mental illness in one state is considered to be "OK" once a state border is crossed.

Whilst this is an oversimplification it is the reality of what is currently the case.

Our son, Steven, was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was approximately 20 years of age. He is now 30. Throughout the ten years of his illness he has been in and out of psychiatric wards. (More in than out.)

During the past five years he has been "Regulated" under the Mental Health act here in Queensland.

On numerous occasions, around pension day, he absconds from the hospital and the police are notified to be on the lookout for him and when found, because he is "regulated" the police have the authority to pick him up and return him to hospital.

However when he crosses the border, neither the mental health professionals nor the police have any legal authority to return him to hospital, despite his classification in his home state.. Unless they can prove that he is "**a danger to himself or others**" they can't re-assess him in hospital. Professional diagnosis and case histories interstate count for nothing.

In our son's case however, since he is non-violent, he is unlikely to come to the notice of authorities. It is therefore up to concerned individuals to draw attention to his plight. Even then unless it is proven that he is a threat to himself or others the authorities are powerless to act by law. If however he was within the state where the diagnosis was made his welfare can legally be safeguarded under law.

When not on medication he can become verbally abusive and is unable to look after himself, his irrational delusions control his existence, however he has the well rehearsed (from ten years experience) ability to communicate coherently with authorities leaving them powerless to act in other states.

In the past when he has "run away" interstate we have had to exaggerate his condition, in order to have him admitted to hospital and put back on medication.

We believe he is currently somewhere in Victoria. Up until pension day April 21st, this year, we knew where he was. Our attempts to have him admitted to a hospital failed and have forced him into hiding from us. (As he once told us "I might be crazy but I'm not stupid.")

As a result we fear for his safety but are powerless to help. No one was legally allowed to help when we knew where he was, now we have the additional burden of knowing he is seriously ill but not knowing where he is.

Whilst our immediate concern for his safety may be answered if he contacts us We would still like to pursue the issue of standardising the Mental Health legal situation nationally both for our son in the future and also for the numerous other frustrated and concerned relatives of the severely mentally ill throughout Australia.

Yours faithfully

(PS One of his delusions is that he is a German prisoner of war (his initials are SS) - hopefully this delusion when carried further does not make him eligible for a detention centre.)