

Secretary, Inquiry into Aged Care,  
Senate Community Affairs Committee,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam,

Having recently witnessed a distressing incident at an aged care facility, I was interested to learn of your Inquiry, and feel compelled to relate this incident to the Inquiry in the hope that something can be done about the appalling and totally inadequate levels of staffing in such facilities.

On Saturday 7th August, I was visiting a relative at a nursing home. Sitting in the garden with her, I heard shouting coming from the nearby Dementia Unit. I didn't take much notice at first as dementia patients often shout, but after it had gone on for a while I became concerned, but assumed the staff would have the situation under control. But when it continued for some minutes and I then heard someone shouting 'stop hitting me' I went to investigate.

I found a wheelchair-bound resident being assaulted by another resident. The attacker did not stop when I approached, and the victim was calling out "call the police" and "she bit me" and showing me her bleeding arm. I managed to persuade the attacker to back off, but not before she got in a few more thumps and twisted the victim's wrist.

I propelled the unfortunate woman away, looking for a member of staff, but couldn't find one. I saw an emergency call button on the wall and pressed it several times but nothing happened. As the little red light didn't come on, I guessed it wasn't connected, so I went off searching down another corridor. When I finally found someone and told her what had happened, she said she had been in another part of the unit and hadn't heard the commotion. She appeared to be alone on the unit. I have been told nursing homes often have fewer staff on weekends, although this doesn't make a lot of sense care-wise. This seemed a large and sprawling area and obviously inadequately staffed if such a commotion could go unnoticed for so long.

What if this had been your loved one, or yourself in a few years' time? Imagine being subject to a lengthy assault with no-one to hear your cries, and being in a wheelchair (not the self-propelled kind) unable to escape. Anyone's worst nightmare. The victim kept asking for someone to call the police. I knew this wasn't going to happen, but I thought she had a point. She is entitled to feel safe in her own home, and I was reluctant to leave her, despite the staff member's assurances that she would take over, as she was so distressed and so vulnerable. Needless to say, the attacker, who was still hovering, could not be held responsible for her actions.

I'm sure this sort of thing happens all the time in many nursing homes, and I don't feel the carer involved should be made a scapegoat, nor even necessarily the institution. Nevertheless, I am driven to do something to speak out for this poor woman and our other most vulnerable citizens who have no voice, who have to live in fear and under threat without adequate care and protection.

I believe this situation is a product of widespread understaffing and underfunding, brought on by bad government policy. We have a huge surplus being wasted on election bribes but can't spare enough to care for our most vulnerable citizens. I hope this awful situation can be rectified.

(Ms) Chris O'Loughlin