

Sent: Monday, 5 December 2005 9:49 AM
To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)
Subject: Mental Health Funding

I would like to share my experience with the mental health system as I believe this area is totally underfunded and a danger to the patients and their family's.

My 60 year old mother with no history of mental illness had a psychotic episode starting Friday night. My father and I had absolutely no idea what was happening or what to do, my husband is a police officer but all the services he uses for mental health are not available on the weekends in Lake Macquarie, and the police would not take her to crisis care because she was not threatening harm to herself or others. She believed the neighbours were burning her with laser beams so we convinced her to go to the hospital to have the burns treated and they called a Psychiatrist to the hospital and scheduled her to James Fletcher Hospital she was seen by two Psychiatrists and committed. This was Saturday afternoon and that was the last contact we had with a Doctor until Monday afternoon as the treating Doctors are not available on weekends, this was an extremely stressful time for the family as she was not assigned a doctor and we had nobody to talk to. The following month was an absolute nightmare to contact doctors/nursing staff to get information, because if you didn't sit with my mum all day until the doctor saw her you couldn't talk to anyone, and because of the mental illness my mum was not able to pass on the truthful information or even give the doctors truthful information about her past behaviours, this was difficult to get time off work to do this. The phones to the nursing staff were often turned off, they said this happened when they had more patients than they were supposed too. There were long waits to have Scans and because of my mums age for first episode we wanted an MRI this took longer again. Whilst I praise the level of training and professionalism of most day staff, there was an extreme lack of availability of doctors, nurses and testing procedures during the week with ABSOLUTELY NOTHING available on the weekends.

I was also frightened for my mums safety with open doors and no call buttons in the room, a blind elderly client in my mums room could not find her way to the toilet at night, my mother was told not to help her because of insurance risk so mum would go to the nurses station to get someone and on several occasions found both staff asleep when they should have been watching out for the safety of sleeping and medicated people not capable of fending for themselves.

The conditions were basic and filthy the rooms smelt of urine the bed was hard and uncomfortable and my mum needed 6 months of treatment to get her back out of pain.

After her release my mother was rang only once by Lakes Mental Health Team and she told them she was fine so she hasn't heard from them since, she was discharged from there after one visit and told to go to her local doctor to ask for scripts for her medications. They should know how hard it is to get people to take their medication and make it easier instead of being managed by doctors without specialist training in this field. She now has no contact with anyone with this training and is going to come off the medication as was suggested after one year with no support as we can't force her to go and ask for help. This burden has been dumped on our family with us having

to research and find out what to do with no guidance and little cooperation from my mother, as although she is mentally ill and not thinking logically she still has the right to refuse our help.

My mother has top medical cover, any other medical condition would have been treated with urgency regardless of day or time and in a comfortable, safe and healthy environment with information available at any time for the family and appropriate follow up care.

I would like to see alot more funding in research, treatment, weekend services, family education, public education and aftercare and this should not have to been done or paid for or money raised by the family's as we are allready caring for people with needs like a baby and stretched to our limits.

