

**Submission
No 25**

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH CARE DELIVERY IN NSW

Name:



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Submission to The Public Accounts Committee - Inquiry into the Management of Health Care Delivery in NSW

This submission is written by [REDACTED] and relates directly to the Delivery of Mental Health Care in NSW that I observed to be in a very sorry state when I had the misfortune to be hospitalized in the same facility not long before Miriam Merten.

I thank Shadow Minister for Health, Tania Milahauk for raising these events in the public arena, after the death of Miriam Merten, and advising me of the public inquiry. There is a need for patients' voices to be heard, and most importantly positive outcomes for a real improvement in the delivery of care for mentally ill people.

During this submission I will cover events relating to:

- My background and experience
- My personal patient experience in Byron Hospital, Tweed Hospital and the mental health unit at Lismore Base Hospital.
- Discharge

Background and experience

Nursing- 10 years. I completed my general nursing certificate at the Teaching Hospitals for the University of NSW. I worked as an RN in intensive care and then moved to interventional radiology and cardiology. I completed a nursing management qualification and became the Nursing Unit Manager for the radiology department at RPA. I was one of the younger Nursing Unit Managers at 26 years of age.

When I came to the department there was an excess of slow moving and dead stock and it was criminal to see how much money had been wasted, and inefficiencies that needed addressing. We planned a strategy to use up the almost 30,000 worth of contrast (that the company would not exchange despite requests) and the thousands of dollars worth of angiographic catheters that were purchased and not consumed before the smaller French sizes were ordered. We implemented a policy of responsible budget management and stock transition with little waste. I was also responsible for the delivery of quality safe patient care- a responsibility I took very seriously.

During this time I worked with some outstanding practitioners and learned interventional and cardiology skills that served me well in my later career. I remember when I resigned, Ken Sherbon, Director of Radiology said to me, "All the good ones leave."

Sales and Marketing, Medical device companies and global corporates- 25 years. During this time I held senior management positions in Global corporates and was a Marketing Leader in the interventional cardiology space. My life was spent working on and in the business here, leading a team of sales and marketing

people, travelling international business class, attending global medical conventions and entertaining leading medical specialists and industry leaders. I am well known in the interventional cardiology space globally.

Patient Experience in the NSW Health Care System

Byron District Hospital

End December 2012: I was spending Xmas at my beach house in Byron Bay when I suffered a psychotic episode. I was picked up naked, by the ambulance and taken to Byron District Hospital. I admit I was pretty crazy and quite anxious regarding the position I was now in. Especially as I was feeling very vulnerable and distressed about no clothes. I was using one blanket like a sarong and another one around my shoulders like a shawl. During the time I was held at Byron Hospital, I was interviewed by the Doctor on duty and two members of the mental health team. I was held there, I estimate for approx. 8 hours. I had calmed down considerably over this time. Looking back, I can't believe that they didn't offer me any tranquilizers to help. When the doctor came in to interview me, I misheard his name, and when I addressed him incorrectly I remember him snapping at me. The mental health nurse eventually told me they were scheduling me to Tweed Hospital. They sent me back in an ambulance all the way to Tweed without any sedation. Byron Hospital transferred a vulnerable patient- no clothes and no sedation after 3 nights with no sleep resulting in an acute psychotic episode.

Now I also remember the mental health nurse gave me a piece of Tibetan prayer flag to breathe through so I could breath good energy in and the little resin egg (I used to carry in my handbag with a little carved guardian angel in it) to hold in my hand for protection.

Tweed Hospital

It was getting dark, by the time we arrived. The ambulance boys wheeled me into the emergency room on a trolley with standard safety straps over the blankets. One waited with me whilst the other one went to find a staff member for patient transfer. What came next was horrendous. They put me in a seclusion room with a big strong metal barrier. So I was jailed in this room, in full view of passers by with a security guard outside. She was nasty and vile to me. Cardiac monitors were going off everywhere, people were running around and it was such an anxious environment it was disturbing me. The nurse came and told me to take the medication she was offering. I asked, "Can you please tell me what the tablets are?" She responded, "Just take the medication." I said, "I'd just like to know what I'm taking?" She then said, "If you refuse the medication again, I'll give you an injection." I reluctantly took the medication. I can remember lying down on the trolley afterwards in the "cell".

Lismore Base Hospital Adult Mental Health Unit

Locked Seclusion Cell Lismore Base Hospital around 28.12.11

I woke up and found myself naked in a room with a camera mounted in the ceiling and an iron cell door. I still had my blankets for clothes. I'm pretty sure I couldn't see out of the door cause the small window was shut. I could hear

people walking in the corridor outside. I knocked on the door to get some attention. No one came, so I amused myself talking to the camera to pass the time. Then the time had come when I really needed to go to the toilet. I hadn't used a toilet since Byron Hospital. I kept knocking and I then decided to go back and ask the camera. I asked if someone could please come and take me to the toilet. Nobody came. I knocked on the door again and again went to the camera to seek help – nothing. So I went to the corner and emptied my extremely full bladder. Eventually someone came and opened the door and they escorted me to a patient room in the locked unit.

Locked Ward Lismore Base Mental Health Unit.

They gave me some clothes to wear from their second hand donated clothes store. I remember ringing my sister in Melbourne and telling her that I was in a bit of a jam and I was locked up in Lismore base hospital with a bunch of crazy people. [REDACTED] was great. She ran a top secret operation as she didn't want this to get out into the medical device industry as I was on leave and the plan was to be well enough to go back to work end January.

My sister sent her husband up to Byron and both my adult sons came to support. I had daily visitors and [REDACTED] acted as my next of kin for discussions regarding medical treatment. I had a family that were keeping a close eye on me and ensuring my safety.

Events that occurred in the locked unit

I couldn't have a shower for three days. This was because the men used to open the shower doors while the women were showering and expose them. I had to wait until I make friends with another women and we kept guard for one another.

The nurses spent most of there time behind the glass in the office, working on their computers, fielding phone calls, making notes and doing tasks resembling office work.

I was standing, speaking on the patient phone outside the glass office, when out of left field a patient came at me and threw me across the room. I landed on my right hip. I have ongoing pain and instability in the hip as a result.

One night I went to the office to make and inquiry. I saw the obese middle aged women sitting there looking at her computer screen. She saw me approach. I just waited at the window. I learned that you just stand and wait and they will get to you eventually. Over 5 minutes had passed and she was still ignoring me and doing something on her computer. I walked around to the side so I could see what she was doing. She was playing solitaire. I tried again to get her attention and eventually did. I just couldn't believe it.

As there was nothing to do in the locked ward we amused ourselves writing to the official visitors. We wrote about everything in the unit that needed maintenance, shower door situation etc.

During the time [REDACTED] the RN on duty said to my sister, "Don't tell me how to suck eggs." there's a story to this but the question is why would a health professional speak to a concerned relative in this way. As I said to [REDACTED] afterwards "he's just a show pony". And that's another story. Remember I had nothing to do and a lot of time to observe.

Days in the locked ward were spent sticking together, watching out for yourself and avoiding any violence from the other patients as you were often out of eyeshot of the nurses. We also had smokes to keep us occupied, as there was nothing to do. From what I remember we had cigarettes and lighters and would hide and smoke where the cameras could not see us as there was usually no nursing staff around to see you.

The Step Down Ward

Finally they let me out of the locked ward and I went to what I considered was the step down. We had our own room with an ensuite bathroom. There were common areas for socializing and eating and courtyards for smoking, even though apparently this was not allowed. We figured out the system early on. They used to let us outside unsupervised to smoke. All clever people learn to become smokers in the psychiatric system, as the smokers are the only ones allowed outside. Not hard to figure it out. If you want to get out of there you have to smoke. We also had cigarettes and lighters in our possession in the step-down.

There was seriously nothing to do. Again there was plenty of time for observation.

The nurses didn't run any groups. I think we were taken to the gym on 1 or maybe 2 occasions, as the nurses were too busy to spare a staff member to supervise.

My son bought in my piano music and I spent hours playing the piano to pass the time.

The pedophile that king hit me in the locked ward came over to our side. The moment I saw him looking at me I said, "Stay the f**k away from me you f**king pedophile. If you as much as come anywhere near me I am going to f**king bash the s**t out of you! And I've got my friends here to help me." I wasn't going to have any more trouble from him.

I clearly remember one nurse, [REDACTED], was, in my opinion a nasty piece of work. She gave [REDACTED] the wrong oral medication one morning. And then followed up with his medication after the drug error. He was a zombie all day. I said to him, "why did you take it? Didn't you tell her that wasn't your name?" He said, "Of course I did. But she just insisted that it was me and just made me take it! Then she came back and gave me my medication as well!"

This same nurse also told me, in reference to an elderly patient that was waiting for a nursing home bed in Canberra, that we were pretty sure had been sexually interfered with by another patient by the name of [REDACTED], that "old people enjoy sex and that they were consenting adults" I just looked at her like - "Oh my God you are so stupid and completely out of your depth!"

In relation to this elderly patient, we kept a lookout by her door during waking hours to see if a medical doctor was going to come and examine her, which would have been the usual practice in my day, but that was never observed. Remember we had nothing to do except keep each other safe and watch what was going on.

I ensured I had the nurse on evening duty lock me into my room of a night time so none of the other patients could enter when I was asleep in bed. (Especially after what we thought had happened to [REDACTED] I even found the toilet seat up in my bathroom one evening - clear evidence to me that a man had been using it.

We also wrote again to the "official visitors" and also wrote a letter to the CEO of Lismore Hospital to make him aware of what was going on in the Adult Mental Health Unit. We hand delivered it to his office and gave it to his secretary.

Discharge

I finally got out after lots of day leave. I used to go and do laps at the pool for hours, shop and eat in Lismore. Finally they discharged me. I had "played their game" and was deemed fit to go. I was so pleased to be out of there and never went back. The strange thing is after being scheduled for around 5 weeks, and given epilim and another psychotropic medication to take (a wafer that melts on your tongue), I was discharged without even a follow up outpatients or specialist appointment. Not that it really worried me....

My life has changed now. I have left my high profile job and am now semi retired. My sons are both young adults with professional careers. I no longer need to keep this top secret.

I told my sister [REDACTED] that I was planning to make this submission and she tried to get me to promise that I wouldn't. She told me the system had been like that for years and wasn't going to change. She said I'll never have to go back there again so don't worry about it. She also said that when she worked in psych that the nurses were crazier than the patients, and that's why she could never work there, and like that's changed.

I am making this submission because the system needs to change, not that I really believe it will.

There is a culture of judgment, lack of compassion, fear, negligence in terms of patient safety, laziness and total disregard for patient dignity. The wounds are deeper when you have been treated like an animal.

I was held like an animal on admission to Lismore Base Hospital. In most probably the same locked seclusion room as Miriam Merten. Fortunately I did get some medication at Tweed Hospital and I was lucid and trying to figure out a plan to get myself free whilst I was locked in there. I watched the footage of Miriam accidentally banging the back of her head hard, when she was trying to lie herself down. It is so distressing. I do not believe this was an isolated incident. Maybe it's time the historical CCTV footage from that room was examined in detail, as it relates to other patients and other staff members' actions in regard to caring for patients locked in seclusion.

I believe the psychiatric system is flawed. It is a dangerous place to have to stay for any time at all. From what I observed in 2013, it hasn't changed since the late seventies when I did my general student nurse psychiatry placement at Prince Henry Hospital. It was actually better then. Even though the psych nurses were pretty "crazy", they ran groups, were always out on the floor, took patients walking, playing ball games and cards etc. and were always around to observe and make sure everyone was safe. This was not happening at Lismore Mental Health Unit.

I wish you all the best with your inquiry.

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