

**INQUIRY INTO OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF
THE NORTHERN BEACHES HOSPITAL**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 24 June 2019

Partially
Confidential

Monday, 24th June 2019

The Chairperson,
Portfolio Committee 2,
NSW Parliament House
Sydney.

I have attached for your consideration letters of complaint and received responses following what I regard as inadequate procedures in my treatment at the Emergency Department of Northern Beaches Hospital (NBH). These letters detail my experience at this hospital.

I am dismayed that the superficial responses and apologies given by the Patient Experiences Manager NBH and the Minister in no way addressed the major issue I have of my treatment,

i.e. the systemic failure that compromised my care. No investigation of the underlying cause of my extreme back pain and leg spasm was initiated. Simple observation and a physiotherapist's report did nothing to discover any possible cause of my pain and inability to walk. No attempt was made to find alternative medication to cope with my frequently stated intolerance to Endone.

To this date the Interim CEO has not responded to my complaints, even though they were addressed to him by name. I might ask, is patient care and satisfactory treatment not part of his responsibility?

My submission may be used in the upcoming inquiry if relevant.

Yours faithfully,

Tuesday, 23rd April, 2019

The Minister for Health,
The Hon. Brad Hazzard,
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

cc: Mr Stephen Gameren , CEO Northern Beaches Hospital.

Dear Mr Hazzard,

As long term residents of Belrose NSW (over fifty years), my wife and I were extremely supportive of and excited about the new Northern Beaches Hospital (NBH) built at Frenchs Forest. However, after my recent experience at the NBH Emergency Department where the care and treatment I received seemed to be inadequate and inappropriate, I wish to formally complain.

I had a serious back problem causing extreme pain. The treatment at NBH did nothing to discover the cause of the level of pain I was experiencing nor was the pain treated appropriately. As a result I was forced to seek help elsewhere. Fortunately the Emergency Department of Sydney Adventist Hospital (SAH) recognised the seriousness of my condition and acted appropriately. I was admitted, given extensive tests and scheduled for extensive spinal surgery with a neurosurgeon within the week. Additionally, appropriate pain management procedures were begun, taking into account my intolerance of codeine based products. This intolerance to codeine products was disregarded at NBH, even after several attempts were made to alert staff that its use would make me sick. Subsequently I was violently ill.

I feel it is necessary to document in detail the events experienced at NBH so that the basis of my complaint can be more thoroughly understood.

1. Prior to seeking help at NBH for the sudden onset of the excruciating pain and spasming of my left leg and complete inability to walk, I was a physically active ambulatory 78 year old man. My only medication for the last eight years has been Crestor 10mg daily for cholesterol management. My intolerance to codeine was discovered when it was prescribed after day surgery several years ago.
2. On Monday, 25th March 2019 the sudden onset of pain was so severe overnight an ambulance was called at about 6.30am. Despite repeated requests not to have any codeine based medication, I was assured by the doctor attending me on arrival that Endone tablets would be the best medication. Again, I protested that Endone would make me violently ill. After further reassurances I was given a total of three (3) Endone tablets and Valium from about 7.30am to 2pm. I was assessed by a physiotherapist and despite still being in considerable pain I was told I could go home, with a prescription for Endone. I reported feelings of nausea, for which anti-nausea tablets were added to counteract the effects of Endone. I was also asked to make an appointment with a physiotherapist.
I was unable to walk so when my daughter asked for a wheelchair to be made available, she was told none of the eight wheelchairs could be found. When my daughter pointed out that one was nearby for my use, I was then pushed out of a No Re-Entry door by a hospital worker into a space with no access to the patient pickup point. I had to crawl across a garden

to a point where the wheelchair could be used. My wife and I waited in the car for some 45 – 50 minutes for my daughter, our driver, who had gone to the Pharmacy to fill the prescriptions, to return. The prescription had been delayed because the script had not been completed correctly. My daughter drove me home then had to return to NBH to collect the scripts at a later time.

At no time did I sight, sign or receive any discharge papers. On later inquiry I was told the fax machine had broken down.

I took two further Endone tablets as prescribed at 6pm and 10pm. By 2am on Tuesday, 26th March I was vomiting violently and still had severe leg pain and spasming. At that time I decided that I would take no more Endone.

3. On Tuesday 26th March, concerned about the advice to see a physiotherapist, I saw _____ who advised against a physiotherapist. He referred me for a CT scan on my back, which was carried out at NBH imaging on this day. He also suggested an endoscopy may be necessary to investigate upper stomach pain and continuous, frequent hiccoughing which had developed.
4. On Wednesday, 27th March my leg and back pain was so extreme during the previous night that my daughter took me by car to the Emergency Department at the SAH. I had no confidence that NBH would provide any suitable treatment for the unbearable pain I was experiencing. At SAH my intolerance to codeine was noted, suitable pain control was implemented and an MRI was scheduled immediately. SAH also contacted the imaging department at NBH for the results of the CT scan. I was then admitted as a patient of a neurosurgeon who scheduled me for spinal surgery on Tuesday, 2nd April 2019.

On Thursday, 28th March 2019 I was given the option to stay in hospital until the following Tuesday, 2nd April to await surgery or to go home.. I chose to go home.

5. By Sunday, 31st March the stomach pain had become extreme and it was painful to eat or drink. I was driven by my son to the Emergency Department at SAH at 11.30pm and admitted for investigation of that pain. On Monday, 1st April I had an abdominal ultrasound and an endoscopy which showed a hiatus hernia and a severely blistered oesophagus. I had no previous history of any such conditions. I stayed admitted, spinal surgery was performed the next day (April 2) and a gastroenterologist was assigned to treat the oesophagus issues.

I was discharged from SAH on Tuesday, 9th April with a well-organised medication plan, collected from the pharmacy as I was wheeled to the pickup point. The entire process was efficient and thorough. To this date my recovery is well under way, I am walking and able to eat without pain.

My questions are these:

Why could I not receive treatment and care at Northern Beaches Hospital when there was such an obvious problem quickly identified and acted upon at another hospital?

Why weren't my warnings of codeine/Endone intolerance taken into account at Northern Beaches Hospital when another hospital saw the implications of this intolerance and made efforts to provide appropriate pain control?

Why were recommendations made to continue taking Endone and to see a physiotherapist when there were no investigations providing evidence of the cause of my condition?

Why was my discharge from Northern Beaches Hospital handled so inefficiently and so insensitively in such stark contrast to another hospital?

As NBH is where we would be taken in any future emergency, we feel it is imperative to document our experience. The hope is that you can reassure us that these issues will be addressed in a way that establishes a caring culture. A set of procedural policies which meets the requirements of a community depending upon first class health care in a first class facility would be a welcome start. We look forward to receiving information as to how you can take action to achieve these fundamental requirements.

Yours faithfully,



6 May 2019

Dear |

Thank you for taking the time to write to us and speak with me by phone about your recent experience at Northern Beaches Hospital (NBH). We take complaints very seriously and use them as an opportunity to improve our service delivery and patient experiences. Your feedback has been reviewed by senior managers in the hospital for their investigation and review.

I understand that you had concerns around a lack of suitable treatment and care and want to assure you that your case has been reviewed by senior medical staff at the Hospital. Review of the notes indicate that the assessment and treatment given was appropriate for your presentation. I apologise for any gap in care during your time here at the Hospital as it is not our intention to cause any additional distress.

I also note your concerns regarding a codeine/Endone intolerance and am sorry if alternative options were not discussed with you at the time. This feedback has been passed onto the treating team and staff have been reminded of the importance of clear, transparent communication and documentation.

Our Wardsperson Manager has reiterated with staff the importance of learning the most appropriate navigation pathways throughout the hospital. We apologise to you and your family and wish to reassure you that this has been used as a teaching opportunity for relevant staff. I also want to apologise that your daughter had such a long wait at the Pharmacy. Medical staff have been counselled regarding the appropriate scripts for patients being discharged from the hospital.

Although I cannot speak to the care you received at the SAN, I want to reassure you that review of your management here by one of our senior consultants concluded that given your presentation and symptoms, your treatment was appropriate at the time. That said, I am so sorry that you were disappointed with aspects of your stay with us and we are actively working on improvements.

If you have any further concerns or questions, please don't hesitate to call me on

Kind regards,

Paula Smith
Patient Experience Manager
Northern Beaches Hospital
Ph: 9105 6055



The Hon Brad Hazzard MP
Minister for Health and Medical Research

Our ref M19/2140

Dear

Thank you for your letter about your care and treatment at Northern Beaches Hospital.

I acknowledge the reasons that prompted you to write and regret the distress you and your family have experienced as a result of this matter. Northern Beaches Hospital strives to provide a high level of patient centred care and it is disappointing to hear of incidents such as this where the level of service has clearly been unsatisfactory.

Mr Stephen Gameren, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Northern Beaches Hospital, has advised that on 24 April 2019, Mrs Paula Smith, Patient Experience Manager, Northern Beaches Hospital, contacted you to apologise and discuss your concerns.

Mr Gameren has further advised that the treating doctor diagnosed you with leg/hip pain and muscle spasm. A full review has been done on the care provided to you and has found that the treatment was appropriate for your condition at the time. Mr Gameren regrets that your experience did not meet your expectations.

In relation to your intolerance to codeine-based medications not being noted on your admission, Mr Gameren regrets that this occurred and has assured me that your medical records have been updated to reflect this. Your concerns have also been raised with the admission staff as a reminder of the importance of documenting all relevant information.

Northern Beaches Hospital is committed to providing appropriate treatment for all people who present at hospital. All public patients will receive the care that they need, consistent with the treatment they would receive in other public hospitals. Compassionate care is the cornerstone of our health system and clinicians in the emergency department have been reminded of their responsibility of providing patient centred care.

In response to your concerns about your discharge, emergency department staff have been given additional training on discharge procedures to ensure patients leave the hospital in a safe and respectful manner. Mr Gameren regrets that your prescription was not filled correctly and that your daughter had to wait to collect your medication. I have been assured that your experience has been used as a teaching opportunity for staff to ensure this does not happen again.

Thank you again for sharing your experience with me. Feedback from patients is invaluable in helping us improve the services we provide. If you would like more information, please contact Mr Gameren on

Yours sincerely

Brad Hazzard MP

31 MAY 2019