

Submission  
No 140

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

**Name:** Mrs Gina Zouroudis

**Date Received:** 30 July 2019

---

Partially  
Confidential

On Sunday 14 July, both my mother in law [redacted] and myself were admitted to the NB hospital via ambulance through the emergency dept. My husband [redacted], My mother in law and I had been at the Belrose Bowling Club for lunch, when at about 2.30pm upon leaving, both her and I fell down some steps outside the club as there was no actual designated wheelchair access. My mother in law is eighty-three years old, suffers from degenerative dementure and is wheelchair bound. I was holding the wheelchair from behind and my husband in front as we carefully descended the few steps one by one, when at the bottom last step, the wheelchair tilted falling backwards, I lost my balance and fell over the top hitting my head on the concrete. I blacked out for a moment and when I came to I had a bleeding nose and immense pain across the face, neck and chest area as well as down my right side as I was still lying on the ground unable to get up. I told my husband who was trying to assist us both to look after his mum first and get her up as she was still on the ground backwards in the wheelchair. He lifted her up, when a couple of patrons from the club who were leaving, also stayed with us giving us assistance and calling the ambulance for us. When the ambulance arrived, I was layed on the stretcher and realising that my mother in law was also involved in the accident, called for a second ambulance. One of the patrons commented to both my husband and the paramedic "not to take us to NB hospital" but he told her, and us that " it was not up to him but rather where he is instructed to go according to the type of injuries we may have sustained. As I was able to advise where I had pain due to my injuries, my mother in law could not express this due to her dementure and language barrier... we are Greek. Upon arriving at the hospital and admitted through emergency, I was in bed 16 and my mother in law, bed 10. Neck and head scans were requested to check if we had any underlying injuries sustained by the fall. I clearly had visible bruising, swelling and "trauma" due to the fall but my mother in law had no apparent external or visible injuries. Once the scans were done and reviewed, my morher in law was given rhe all clear released at around 8pm and returned to [redacted] nursing home where she resides.. She left with my sister in law who took her back by maxi cab with wheelchair transport. I was also given the all clear and released at around 9pm. On Mon 15/07 my husband went to visit his mother in the nursing home and was told by the RN that it seemed that she was indicating that she had pain in the back of her neck when being moved/changed. Not being able to fully verbalise her pain and discomfort due to her dementure, and with no visible brushing to the area, they thought it may have been " like whiplash" due to the fall. On Tue 16/07 upon visiting his mother, was again told that she seemed to be still sore and that they had the physiotherapist work on her neck area. A request was sent to her GP to come and visit to see if there was anything further that may be needed to help her. On Wed 17/07 I went to visit her at around 10.30am. They had her in the bed chair with a "travel type" pillow supporting her neck. The RM advised me that her pain and discomfort was still persisting and seemed to be in some distress. The physiotherapist attended and ended up putting a soft neck collar on her. I insisted they contact her doctor to come and that perhaps we send her back to the hospital for further scans. Her doctor visited and after I explained to him the accident, examined her and gave the okay to have her sent back for further scanning. The nursing home called for patient transport at around 11.30am and said it should be about half an hour or so... Three and a half hours later they arrive and the paramedics spent time accessing her condition and whether she should be transported back to NB or Royal North Shore as she made have neck or spinal injury. Their decision was to take her back to NB and once again was admitted through emergency and awaiting to be accessed again and possibly scanned again. My husband a sister in law came around 5.30pm and were visited by the doctor [redacted] who advised us that they looked at the original scans done on the Sunday and actually found that they missed that SHE HAD A BROKEN C2 VERTABRAE IN HER NECK. So after being misdiagnosed and released on Sunday with a broken vertabrae, no correct care, no medication or pain killers, you could only imagine how much pain she would have been in and unfortunately, due to her dementure, not able to express this pain. We were shown only one picture on the doctors phone of the break but only a showed a small piece of the break and

nothing else, but apparently this break went all the way around. There was discussion in regards to her condition and as an operation due to her dementure and age was not an option, nor was a Laura j neck brace, a soft collar neck brace would be the option. We understood that this injury would be "unstable" without surgery. She was placed in short stay emergency for that night and the next day where we looked at our options for her care. On Thursday 18/07 we spoke with the nursing home who confirmed they could care for her moving forward but asked to wait till Tue 23/07 as the OT and Physio would not be in till then and could altogether devise a care plan along with the RN's and nursing staff. Since this was the case, she was moved from short stay emergency to Ward 6C where she would stay till then. We visited her every day and would be there all day with her. She was eating some foods and liquids. On Mon 22/07 my husband visited his mother in the morning and seemed to be Ojay as she was awake and had some breakfast. He left and as we all worked, I went back in the afternoon at 5.30pm to stay with her for the evening and feed her dinner. She was not eating and would not swallow anything. Even her medication that was crushed and mixed in custard she would not take. My sister in law arrived shortly after. She seemed not to respond to much either. While there we noticed her right shoulder, arm and leg twitch quite noticeably and reported it to the nursing staff who later came in and administered something (cannot remember) to either relax or stop the shaking. As she was not eating or drinking we ended up leaving for the night as she seed to be sleeping. The next morning when my sister in law went to get her ready for transfer back to the nursing home, she was told by the nursing staff that she was unresponsive and may not make it past the afternoon. She immediately called my husband (her brother) and he went to the hospital. At that stage she was still alive but unfortunately PASSED AWAY at around 9.30am. I was notified to contact our priest who also attended but unfortunately it was too late. Still at this stage we do not have any report as to what the actual cause of death was for my mother in law. We did not expect her to pass away so quickly but feel somehow the outcome may have been different if this was diagnosed correctly and the break not have been missed in the initial scans on the Sunday of first admission. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information. Gina