

Submission
No 568

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

My experiences within the NSW rural health system and an overlap with Queensland Health (as I live in northern NSW) has not been a happy one. My postcode is 2464 (Yamba) and on the 22 September 2019 I broke my back. I had a complete compression fracture of Lumbar 3 and a piece of bone broke off and went into/near my spinal chord. My Lumbars 1 and 2 and Lumbars 4 and 5 are touching each other.

I was taken by ambulance to Maclean Hospital where an xray was taken which supposedly was inconclusive. I was told I would have to travel to Grafton to get a CT scan the next day and I was sent home with pain killers. The next day my friend drove me to Grafton, where I had the CT scan. However, before we even left Grafton my doctor rang me and told me to immediately come back to Yamba where an ambulance (at 3.30pm) would take me to Pindarra Private Hospital, Gold Coast where a surgeon was waiting for me as my back was very "unstable".

This is actually where the "fun" begins and it is almost surreal. First of all, the ambulance co-ordinator based in Newcastle, rang me at 5.30pm, to say the ambulance wasn't picking me up until the next day. I told him that I had a broken back and that my doctor had rung for the ambulance. He then said, "I should ring Dr [redacted] then." I was in an incredible amount of pain and suggested that was a good idea. After speaking to Dr [redacted] the co-ordinator rang me to say that an ambulance would pick me up at 7.30pm. (I found out that night that that was the time for the change of shift and thus NSW Ambulance would not have to pay overtime!) Where is the welfare of the patient in all this?!?

The ambulance people were lovely and I had 15mg of morphine on the way to Pindarra. However, I had to retell them everything because they couldn't access any of my records. We didn't arrive at Pindarra until 11.00pm and the ambulance drivers took me to the room that Dr [redacted] allocated me. However, when I asked for some painkillers I was transferred to the Emergency Department where I was treated abysmally. I have made a complaint about this to Pindarra and received an apology but suffice to say that My Health Record supposedly could not be accessed and I had to pay an extra \$300 for this night in Emergency where I had to "walk" myself to and from the toilet. I was returned to my ward room the following morning and spent nine days in the Spinal Unit.

Apparently, I am a "miracle" because Dr [redacted] couldn't believe I was standing, let alone taking steps, with the injuries I had received. I wasn't operated on because the bone left only 17mm space around my spinal chord. I have seen Dr [redacted] on a number of occasions since and he acknowledges that I have a very high tolerance to pain and that he has a number of patients who have half the injuries I have but are nearly totally incapacitated. I have him totally flummoxed.

However, here is the further dilemma. I belong to Teachers Federation Private Health and am a self-funded retiree which I have found to be to my disadvantage. I had to arrange for someone to pick me up from Pindarra and had to lie down as at that stage I couldn't sit. Basically the only thing I could do for the first two months after my accident was to go to the toilet, have a shower and be driven to the doctors and physio (only allowed after six weeks as before then it was total bed rest). I was on a high dose of Targin and anti-inflammatory tablets (have now halved my Targin dose but still on them and my anti-

inflammatory drugs so that I can reasonably function). My physio did arrange for me to have a walker and I already had a shower stool. However, I could do nothing else especially such things as shopping, cleaning etc. I did try and get a cleaner but they were rather unreliable due to the tourist season.

I live by myself and the simple fact is that I had to rely on my friends and my ex-husband to look after me. There was no information forthcoming about what services I could access and I certainly felt very isolated. There needs to be an urgent review of how NSW patients leaving Queensland hospitals are processed and a much better referral system so that chronically injured patients, such as myself, do not fall through the cracks.

As far as I am concerned my experiences illustrate major flaws in the NSW healthcare system. Thanking you for taking the time to read my brief submission.