

Submission
No 603

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

Name: Mr Don Graham
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Partially
Confidential

Don Graham

Royal Commission

into Aged Care Quality & Safety

GPO Box 1151

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30th July 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

Our mum lived at her home in Dubbo NSW for about 56 years. It was a hard decision to enter full time aged care for both her & the family. I remember how stressed she was about leaving her home. Our father pre deceased mum by 32 years. They were totally devoted to each other & their family. Without any previous experience I thought aged care facilities were run like hospitals. How wrong I was. I would hate to think our hospitals are as bit & miss as aged care is at times.

When I left mum on her first day at Catholic Healthcare's St. Mary's Villa, in Dubbo they told me not to visit for a few days. Mum would have fretted badly. I lasted 2 days & she was so glad to see me. It was very short sighted & thoughtless to do that to our mother. One size does not fit all. I thought they could ask "out going residents" if they would like to meet & greet "new residents". To make them feel more at home & to hopefully settle in a bit easier.

We were shown a large room, when we had a look with mum, nothing was said about the small room she was given, on arrival.

The care at St. Mary's was at times good other times reasonable & sometimes poor. The accreditation inspections are a farce to a degree. If they are not already they should be unannounced & then they would see the real situation.

Management wanted to move mum to newer quarters at their Holy Spirit Aged Care for "more suitable care". Holy Spirit was worse for mum than St. Mary's. A lot to do with this was the 2 "carers" mum often had. Management is only as good as the staff & vice versa.

In the interests of good design & function Holy Spirit is poorly designed & built. (The best design for rooms that I have seen is to

have them layed out the same way as well designed motel rooms)

It is vital that a fairly new facility like that is user friendly. Some of the things I noticed - I felt a clerk of works would have prevented from happening. They should be there to protect everyones interests. Such as, the help buzzer near mums toilet was out of easy reach & often covered by a towel. The tiling in the shower area allowed the water to wash across the rest of the floor, into the walkway. The car park was too small from day one. There is no undercover area, to pick up or set down residents. I had no choice, but to park in the mud, beside the small sealed car park & do the best I could, to shelter mum from the rain.

The waste of good items is extreme, in both facilities. (I hope this has changed) Holy Spirit threw out a good electrically operated recliner chair I bought for her, without any notice as to who owned it.

When a resident would pass away & didn't have any family or their family was unavailable, everything went into a huge steel dumpster bin. That included good clothing, their television set, furniture & personal items etc. If there was any due respect or consideration for that person, surely a discreet visit by a charity could be arranged.

One of the most concerning problems with aged care is the totally unsuitable people in some management positions. There are not enough good ones. Too much time is spent on "damage control" & putting out "fires", than preventative measures. I feel too many managers are employed for their ability to get rid of people, who have genuine & real concerns, short of legal action being taken.

I had the privilege to speak to two ladies, who were aged care managers about 25 years ago. They are now retired. These ladies had the respect of the staff, the aged residents & their families. This is sadly lacking in too many managers & some carers today. Good staff moral is vital, talented registered nurses & personal carers etc. are lost to age care facilities because of insensitive & poor management. It is a very sad situation that registered nurses have been severely cut back in numbers. Frail, elderly & venerable people, often in poor

health, deserve a lot better.

Politicians & aged care managers should spend a night or two in an aged care bed. Like our precious mother they could hear the cries of anguish from residents at night. Also the real possibility of a carer that does not care attending to them. While they are thinking of their own home & bed & loved ones.

I remember mum visiting us at home. As I was about to take her back for the evening meal at Holy Spirit, mum raised her head. Her beautiful eyes looked into mine. Mum then said "Can I stay here tonight?" as she sat outside her bedroom door in her wheelchair. It's a "sweet" memory, of a beautiful mother who endured so much in "aged care" or "not enough care". The tears have come into my eyes. They are some of the memories I try to suppress.

That's when I doubled the time I spent with her, at Holy Spirit & taking her out. Sometimes 8 or more hours a day.

Some were some of the few carers who should not have been working there or any other aged care facility. There were "angels" too & some in the middle ground.

I was concerned about an incident with "care" for mum. Or the lack of it. (I treat everyone as I would like them to treat me) I wanted to speak to her about this, but she just turned on her heel & walked out of mum's room. I then made the "mistake" of speaking to the manager. After that mum & I got the "cold shoulder" treatment from (her co worker). I felt she would have been a more suitable person to be working with Corrective Services.

Mum would say "They threw me into bed" I wanted to see how they managed her leading up to this. I received the feedback that the carers did not want you in the room, because you would be aware of what they do to your loved ones.

Our mother did not like the floor based lifter they used. I asked if they would allow mum to walk from the bathroom to her bed. (I had mum walking as much as possible, to help keep the strength in her legs) They "demonstrated" her

walking but were in such a rush, they went too fast for her & were dragging her forwards. Naturally this then put her off balance! Anything goes to get the residents into bed & knock off on time.

Mums teeth were blue with mould. I would clean them for her. You would be aware of what it feels like if you don't clean your teeth of a morning. Can you imagine what the blue mould would feel like on your teeth? Also the other poor victims of the rush to get residents into bed with the foul odour in their mouths.

There is too little cooperation between various duties. Such as the staff who make the beds for the residents. The beds are made in an "army style". Tight corners, tight bed sheets & blankets. Mum had never liked having her feet pinned down. Who would? But the message does not get through to the staff. I would loosen the sheets & blankets. I don't like to think about how mum got on when I was not there. Everyone should be aware of obvious things that can cause a lot of distress. I was arranging a metal frame to take the weight off leading to the time mum passed away. On the 27th September 2011. Management should once again take the lead.

Because I would often take her out for the morning or afternoon mum & I came to an arrangement that I would change her pad if she needed it. It was either that or back to "poison" as she once said. When 2 burly female carers took mum to the toilet it reminded me of 2 blokes getting something out of the way. Other carers did better. Mum was only about 150 cms tall & 43 kilos. Mum said she preferred me taking her.

One night before her meal I found her pad soaking wet. The staff may have been too busy, but that does not help if your mother has skin damage from the urine. I promptly changed it, for which she was so grateful.

Mum said to me one night "Thanks for looking after me" & I said in return "It's a privilege". Mum was so devoted & caring to us as a family.

I remember a very caring carer, in her mid fifties saying to me, that she asked mum "Why don't you speak to the management about your wet sheets of a mornning?"

was the night carer at this time & she told me that night work suited her!. As there was no one to check up on her work. The caring carer (angel) would put a fan under mum at night.

was one of the "carers" who should not have been employed anywhere, in aged care. They are employed because of the desperate shortage of carers.

Mum then replied to the good carer "I don't want to say anything about the wet sheets, as they may not want to look after me." Hearing that from mum was very distressing & extremely disappointing. Our elderly loved ones are so vulnerable & defenceless.

A huge problem in aged care has resulted from some managers with big titles, working behind closed doors. They need to take a leaf out of the former hospital matrons handbook, of the mid 1900's. They ran a "tight ship" & would check on the patients well being & general care. If they found her urine soaked sheets, it would not be happening the next night. There may well have been one less nurse (as well as a position to be filled).

Mum was diagnosed with mild alzheimers. This can be used as a negative by some carers. With due respect to those carers, mum was mentally ahead of them.

Our mother had about 18 mths. at each facility. I genuinely wish our precious mum, could have died 3 years earlier. As peaceful as possible. That is a sad reflection on the aged care "industry". Also sad that it's true. Mum could have "escaped" & not suffered so much in aged care. I said to a carer that mum & I were existing, rather than living. There is a big difference in the two.

I thought another "pay back" for speaking to management was when I found mum one evening in her wheelchair. It was positioned facing a blank wall, a bit over a metre away. I said to her "How long have you been sitting there?". Mum said "Too long".

I will take the horrible memories of mum's cruel & disgusting death.

through so called "palliative care" to my grave. I hope it won't haunt me, if I should need aged care myself. God help us one & all.

I will also be eternally grateful to the "angels" that work in aged care & the good things that Catholic Healthcare did.

My plea to those who make the decisions regarding Aged Care Quality & Safety - Please put some "teeth" back into the tiger" Even a decent set of dentures would be a good start.

I agree to my submission being made public under my name.

Don Graham

Dubbo

Yours most sincerely

P.S. My sincere thanks to those responsible for making a Royal Commission possible. Also the dedicated work by so many, Australia wide

They have allowed the defenseless & frail, to aged to have a strong voice within the community, to which they so rightly belong.