

Build Four Modern Psychiatric Hospitals

From: [REDACTED]
To: Royal Commission Victoria Mental Health System (DPC) <contact@rcvmhs.vic.gov.au>
Date: Tue, 09 Jul 2019 13:27:57 +1000

Dear Royal Commission,

I have maintained an interest in mental health issues for many years.
I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Philosophy from the University of Melbourne.
I worked for a brief period at Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital in 1973 '74.
I was a Student Ambulance Paramedic with the Metropolitan Ambulance Service 2002 '03.
I have been the editor of Biotech Daily since 2005.

In 1973, Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital had three wards each for men and women. I worked in 'Lister' Ward which was the heavy lock up and admissions ward. There was a parallel ward for women and medium security wards for patients requiring supervision and minimum security wards from which patients were able to leave the premises.

While it had problems with some authoritarian staff, it was most unlike [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. It was not a matter of out of mind, so out of sight. There was an attempt to be progressive.

The closure of these facilities means there is nowhere to go for voluntary patients who need help, and those who may be aggressive or violent can only expect the assistance of – mostly untrained police.

As an ambulance paramedic for about 12 months in 2002 '03 I attended a number of psychiatric cases. One that I shall never forget was a young woman who had parked her car at a petrol station late at night and asked the attendant to call an ambulance.

When we arrived she said (clearly and lucidly): "I'm bi polar and I just need to be somewhere safe." With no fuss she entered the ambulance and we took her to [REDACTED] psych unit where she had previously attended and handed over – in the sad knowledge that she would be discharged in 12 – 24 hours.

Many of the rough sleepers are people with great needs and nowhere to go.

Victoria needs to rebuild the psychiatric hospitals sold by Premier [REDACTED] to the property developers, but make them modern and progressive – able to restrain those who need to be and help those who can be helped. The premise that [REDACTED] copied from Britain's Margaret Thatcher was a distorted and false amplification from Dr RD Laing's work on helping people back to the community. Dr Laing never said that Governments should abrogate total responsibility for all vulnerable people and just kick them out in the cold and rain. But Thatcher and [REDACTED] did. That policy was a transparent disgrace at the time and we are seeing its impact most harshly 20 years later.

Given the growth of the State, I believe we need five major institutions able to cater for 300 400 patients each. There should be one close to the inner city and four others within easy travel for families and patients. They must have landscaped grounds that are pleasant and relaxing. The high cost to the State to rebuild what was unnecessarily destroyed will be a constant reminder of the failure of neo con policy.

I believe that if we had proper, large, well built, well staffed and maintained psychiatric hospitals,

we would have far fewer people sleeping rough, in danger of both the elements and others.

The murder of Courtney Herron, just a few hundred meters from the grounds of the old Royal Park Hospital, should weigh very heavily on those who chose to close our psychiatric hospitals.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Melbourne

Mobile [REDACTED]