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My experiences with the Mental Health System:

EDITS FROM TODAY 24/54

- The Psych Dr in [REDACTED] who asked me to show him my arm when I told him I had a history of self-harm, and then went, wow you really do.

I want to reiterate that what I said today and what is in this document are purely descriptions of my interactions with services. I have been irreparably harmed by the mental health service. I have felt disempowered and lost. I have felt that the only way to get attention is to hurt myself, and then felt punished for showing pain. I have been made to feel as though I am just an illness – that I will never be anything more than that. Except that I'm not even worth the diagnosis of illness – I'm just a broken personality, nothing ill with me, so I can't be fixed. I have been dropped from practitioner to practitioner. I have been lied to. I have lost all trust in the system, to the point that I avoided it last year after my psychiatrist changed my meds and refused to help me, which was partially what led to my relapse that ended up with me in hospital. I have been discriminated against by services and by my work place, for having not just a mental illness, but a personality disorder. I have felt so alone. I have felt so hurt. I will never, ever lose the scars that the system has given me. I have so little hope and so little trust, that when the support person today talked to me about looking at proper support ongoing, and that I could try and get a referral to [REDACTED], my first response in my head was, that's not a service for people like me. That's a service for people who are really sick. I've made an appointment to speak to my GP to get a referral, and I'm already preparing myself to be told that I'm not getting support from them for "fill in literally 10s of reasons I've heard before". This system has tried to tear my life apart for the crime of having BPD, not a mental illness, and then for having BPD with no major trauma in my life. To have it suggested that you are faking something that is as horrific as BPD because you weren't abused or assaulted as a child just eats away at the part of my brain that has been drummed into me from the time I first saw the school counsellor: you're not sick, you're just after attention.

Which reminds me, one last thing: The time I was discharged from a hospital – I can't remember which one, and within 24 hours had overdosed [REDACTED] They spent two days getting my bloods to a safe level, and had to do arterial blood tests to make sure the antidote was working. I was scared and everything was out of control, so I self-harmed. I bled everywhere due to the blood thinning results of the painkillers. I was yelled at and called a stupid girl by the nurse who then got me sectioned for being a threat to others' safety after I threw my phone into some jackets on a seat.

I was 12 - 2013. I was in Year 8 of high school. My parents had found out I was self-harming, and told me I had to see the school counsellor. His response was to tell me that I must be ashamed of my scars. I had not been, but now I was. He did not suggest further psychological help. He tried to 'counsel' me about how I felt. I was not ready for help, I didn't even really understand I was ill. He did not use any specific psychological tools – he wasn't a psychologist. I lived in Melton [REDACTED]

██████████) but went to school in Ballarat. At no point did he search for services in my area. I honestly believe that I would not have become so ill with early intervention.

I was 16 - 2017. On advice from friends, I go to my GP – he is well meaning but does not know much about mental health. I was not referred to a psychologist or further assessed. I am prescribed Prothiden, a tri-cyclic anti-depressant. I will find out later that this drug was phased out due to its high toxicity. I receive no warnings or education.

I was 17 - 2018. I go to the ED to get stitches. I have received my education on mental health, self-harm, and the hospital system from the internet. I know what to say when I'm questioned about my cuts – that I haven't done it in ages, and that I had a slip up – and they call a MD, but do not request anyone from MH sees me.

I was 17 - 2018. My parents have taken me to psychologists, who I lie to. I do not understand mental illness. I have only ever been diagnosed with mild depression. They take me to ██████████ (where we have lived since 2015). They take me into a room and interview me for an hour. No one really explains to me what is happening or why. I receive no information from ██████████. They tell my parents that they will not treat me because I am too high risk. They tell my parents to try adult. Adult will not support me because I am under 18.

I was 17 – 2018. My parents have taken me to a private psychiatrist. He says he is a specialist in Adolescent Mental Health, but he calls VCE HSC. He diagnoses me with BPD at my first appointment after my 18th birthday. He admits me to hospital – I think it was to take me off my meds. He told me there was no point me being medicated because I have a personality disorder – it's just my personality and cannot ever get better. I self-harm while I am in hospital – I have pre-prepared and smuggled in razor blades. They try to stop the bleeding and can't, so I get sent to ED, where I wait for hours. I bleed through two bandaged. Eventually, I am pushed through to see a doctor by the admin intake person – who happened to be an old family friend. The doctor swears when she takes the bandages off, and immediately tourniquets my arm with a blood pressure cuff. I have nicked a periphery artery. From here I am sent to ██████████ hospital, on a section. I have not tried to attempt suicide, and have stated so multiple times, but the psychiatrist has decided I was attempting to die by suicide when I self-harmed. They interview me after 36 hours, and find that I am not suicidal. I am discharged with no plan, and no further support from the private psychiatrist. My parents will later tell me that the nursing staff had wanted me to be discharged back into the ██████████ because they thought I had been getting better.

From here, I get incredibly ill, and have multiple contacts with mental health and health services. Some that stand out:

- The psychiatrist who was double billing my parents and Medicare.
- Multiple overdoses, suicide attempts, and self-harm presentations. I am never interviewed in depth. I become a frequent flier, and answer the same questions the same way. This is routine for the medical staff I see. I have no mental health support. I speak to a GP who tells me that I should be on lithium and that he's my GP now. I get sick of the stigma of getting my stitches out at the GP, and the huff they go into, so I start taking them out myself.
- I present to get stitches at ██████████. The nurse gets angry with me for wasting time and taking her away from people who really need her help. I don't feel better, so I go back to college, self-harm again, and go to the ██████████. They freak out when they hear that this is my second presentation for stitches in one night. He calls ██████████

- I eventually get treated by [REDACTED]. I am only given a case manager after I attempt suicide, and the ED Dr refuses to discharge me unless it is into [REDACTED]. I am held for three days, then discharged to [REDACTED]. As a result, I get allocated a team immediately. It was a minimum of a six week wait before I was admitted.
- I have more multiple overdoses and suicide attempts and self-harm.
- My friend from [REDACTED] dies by suicide while she is an inpatient. I get no added support.
- I show up to [REDACTED] going in and out of black outs due to an overdose. I have a cut in my arm that is approximately 10cms. I end up taking myself to ED after my case manager says she can't see me. I receive 4 stitches and the ED Dr covers the wound in its entirety with steri-strips, and then am discharged. I go back a day later. The new Dr says I am lucky not to have blood poisoning. He lies about giving me long lasting local, then cleans my wound out two hours later with a wire brush. It is re-stitched. I receive 23 stitches.
- I self-harm in the [REDACTED]. They take to me to [REDACTED] (a 30 second walk). We wait for 7 hours. I am sent back without being seen. My mother finds out and yells, and they say they won't stitch it now because it is too old. My mother rings around private hospitals, and pays for my wound to be stitched. I wait approximately another five hours in the private ED. I self-harm on 15 minutes obsvs, with a razor blade my friend smuggles in in a magazine. There is a maybe 2m diameter pool of blood around me by the time the check on me in the bathroom, rather than taking my word that I'm fine
- I am constantly in and out of hospital, as [REDACTED] won't admit someone with BPD for more than 72 hours.
- I have been on 10s of anti-depressants. I am inpatient at the [REDACTED]. I have previously been on citalopram, and it has done nothing. A psychiatrist states she will not let me out of ICU unless I take e-citalopram and keeps talking about how it will be better. I take it for five days to get out.
- I am incredibly suicidal. I have been at [REDACTED], where I discharge to [REDACTED]. The Psychiatrist provides me with a referral letter that says I'm on an unfortunately high level of anti-depressants, and that I'm difficult, mostly due to my BPD. I am discharged from [REDACTED] I present at [REDACTED]. The only public hospital bed in the state is in Ballarat. They will not take me back after the admission in which I self-harmed and hit it from them. This is the same admission where a male kissed me without my consent. Instead, I spend three days in ED, as the doctor will not let me leave. While I am there, I organise my own admission to a private hospital – [REDACTED].

I am approximately 25 – 2016. I am seeing the same psychiatrist who admitted me to the [REDACTED] approx. 2011. They have been pretty decent – they are prescribing me meds under an incorrect diagnosis in order to make them affordable (\$420 vs PBS price/month). I go in and tell them I feel I no longer fit the criteria for BPD. At this point, the understanding I have is limited, but decent, due to education from [REDACTED] and my own research. It has been recognised in Europe that you can be in recovery from BPD. The private practice in Australia is very behind the times. They tell me I will never get better, or that the diagnosis will go away. When I try to explain my reasoning and the research, I am told that me stating I do not feel I am experiencing BPD symptoms just proves that I have BPD.

I was 27 - 2018. I have been seeing my psychiatrist for several years. He changes my medications, as he has been defrauding Medicare as the Doctor above. The new medication I am switched to does not work for me. I have to take two weeks off work and spiral into a depression. I am crying constantly for no reason. I go back after 4ish weeks and say that I don't think I can keep myself safe. He tells me to keep taking my meds and writes me another script for a benzo at my request. I walk out in almost hysterics and the receptionist tells me that sometimes I need a good cry to get it out. I do not see him again. I do not actively seek a psychiatrist very hard. I am already very ill and well into a relapse which will have me hospitalised later in 2018. There is no safety net in the private system, as I must do all the searching myself. By the time I find a psychiatrist who understands BPD – as best as I can hope (she's actually pretty on the ball with BPD and will impress me), I am so sick that in three days, I will make an emergency appointment, and an admission will be organised. She no longer has admitting rights to [REDACTED], and if I need admission again, I will have to be treated by a random doctor – like the one who took me on in an earlier admission, and despite my diagnoses post-[REDACTED], states that I am on an unfortunately high level of mood stabilisers he will have to get me off, and diagnoses me with mild dysthymia as my only illness – this is the same Dr mentioned above with the whole she's difficult, good luck comment in his referral letter.

I was 28 - December 2018, my psychiatrist is on holiday, and I am having a MH crisis. I speak to my GP, who says he cannot do anything because he can't overstep his bounds – he will not change my meds, which I believe I need. He makes sure I have phone numbers I can call, and says the only thing he can recommend/do is tell me to call the [REDACTED] – there is no combined care plan in position for if this happens. I call the [REDACTED] and I am taken on by [REDACTED] for a period of a month or so, who are to cover me while my psychiatrist is on holiday. They do an intake appointment and say they can definitely support me, and can possibly change my meds, and will contact me to make a counselling appointment. They do not contact me again for approx. 3 weeks; I don't contact them because I am ill, and not able to make good decisions. When they call, they ask if there's anything I still need help with. I tell them I think I need an appointment. I go in and speak to someone, who offers some basic practical strategies I had already had to seek from my family. They then call me again in two weeks, when I say that I am fine now, and that I do not need to remain in their service. They did not contact me or assist me in any way during the time I was on their books, except for one appointment in which most of the time was spent telling me how I should rehab my knee after surgery I had just been through.

I was 28 - 2019. I see a new psychologist as mine has just moved to Ballarat. He tells me at my second appointment that he does not think I want treatment. I say I do, and tell him I don't know what sort of treatment I want because I've never had to direct it before. He says that most people with BPD work on trauma. I remind him I don't have any. He tells me I am ambivalent about treatment and gives me his card and tells me to call him if I change my mind. I leave the session after 40 minutes at his insistence and am charged the full 55 minute rate.

That's about everything that sticks out in my mind from my interaction with services.

Also please note that in this whole time period, [REDACTED] receives no support. [REDACTED] have maybe three sessions at [REDACTED] and that is the best that happened. [REDACTED] will go on to develop

severe eating disorders. [REDACTED] was suicidal and didn't realise he was 'severely depressed' because he had seen me be out of control while he was growing up.

I would like to add these 4 things:

1. The lack of ability of private services to work together to support patients is astounding and terrifying. I have absolutely no coordination of care., and only ever had any when I was with [REDACTED]
2. After the Royal Commission interview, I requested a referral to [REDACTED] from my GP. He said he would send it, but he had been told they would not accept patients who are being treated by private psychiatrists. I have not had any contact from [REDACTED] re the referral but know that it was sent, so can only assume this to be true.
3. I have private health insurance and see a private psychiatrist- and I am incredibly lucky to be able to do so. My parents pay approximately \$700/month for my mental health treatment, which includes a psychologist and psychiatrist appointments, medications, and health insurance- which I have to maintain at top hospital cover, just in case I require an admission to hospital, as psychiatric services are only covered on top/complete/highest level hospital covers. I would not be able to access the mental health treatment I do without their financial support- and I'm 28. I don't even want to imagine where I would be without my family as a support and financial backing; I'd probably be dead.
4. The number of not quite rights/inaccuracies in the draft statement only supports the fact that my history with the mental health system is so ridiculously complicated that even an hour appointment with lawyers does not have it perfectly correct and is light on details- think about actually navigating that story while being incredibly sick.