

Elena Macdonald – Submission

I have struggled with (diagnosed) anxiety and depression since 2015. In April 2018, I had just begun my first year at university. The new workload, combined with pain from several chronic illnesses, had made me very suicidal. I had a psychiatrist, who prescribed my medications. At the time, I had been trying to find a psychologist, but had yet to find one I felt comfortable with. There was little information available to me about who would be good. My GP had little knowledge of which psychologists had good patient feedback, and so it was a matter of trying as many as possible, whilst also trying not to use up too many of the 10 sessions covered by Medicare in the process. During this period, the impact of my pain upon my mental health was not addressed.

On Saturday, 7th April 2018, I was feeling very suicidal. In the evening, I rang [REDACTED], who sent me to [REDACTED]. I was assessed, and told there wasn't much they could do within the hospital. They told me they would refer me to [REDACTED], who would be able to provide the help I needed. An appointment was set up at [REDACTED] for the following Tuesday. It was then moved to the Thursday (April 12th), due to the doctor being unavailable.

During this time in between, I remained very suicidal. There was no support provided during this time, and nothing to prevent me from committing suicide but the support of my parents (who do not live in Victoria, and were therefore only accessible for help by phone).

When I saw [REDACTED], I saw one doctor. I spoke to them for perhaps half an hour. At the time, I was seeing a psychologist, but did not feel very comfortable with her. I did not feel that seeing her again would help. The doctor I saw (I believe he was a psychiatrist) wanted to change my medications. I did not feel comfortable with this, as I had had a lot of trouble finding a combination of anxiety and depression medications that worked with my current psychiatrist – who had identified that my medications were not contributing to my decreased mood and suicidal ideation.

The doctor at [REDACTED] then decided that, as I was currently seeing a psychologist, I should continue seeing her – though I had indicated that she was not helping me. That was the end of my appointment.

I was very suicidal at the time of that appointment, and very suicidal after. Despite my indicating that I was still struggling, and that I was still experiencing suicidal ideation, this was the plan I was presented with. During the following months, I tried a few more psychologists, but did not find one I worked well with. My mental health did not get better. In the first week of June 2018, I attempted suicide by overdosing [REDACTED], and was taken to emergency, again at [REDACTED]. Luckily, I did not cause any lasting damage with this attempt, and was sent home within a day. The hospital planned to set me up with a pain specialist, as I was then in considerable pain, which was again feeding into my suicidal ideations. Two nights later, I was back in the emergency department of [REDACTED]. I was very suicidal. I was told there was little the hospital could do, as they already had a plan in place; I just had to wait.

My clearest memory from that night was running out of emergency while we were waiting, heading for my home, which was just nearby. I knew the hospital wouldn't help, and was planning to overdose more 'effectively' this time. My Dad, who was with me, chased me down the street and through the dark park. It was around 11pm by then. It was only by the efforts of my Dad chasing me through the park that night, and not straying from my side, that I did not overdose then. That is one of my most harrowing and traumatic memories – here I was, suicidal, with the knowledge that I would not get any immediate professional help that would keep me safe; there was nothing to help me.

There were several more periods after this of suicidal ideation, where I was saved only by the efforts of my parents. It took until September for me to find a psychologist who I felt comfortable with, and who had the right approach for me; since seeing her, my mental health has greatly improved. The experiences in the Victorian health system last year, however, remain very traumatising to think back upon. There were numerous instances where there was no support available whatsoever, and I could have committed suicide during any of these times, despite the recognition by health professionals that

I was at risk. There was no support in place to prevent this happening – and indeed, I did come very close. There must be better support for patients at immediate risk of suicide. I am no health professional, so I do not pretend to know the answers; what I do know is that there needs to be better supports in place in order to prevent situations like mine from ever occurring, and especially on such a repeated scale.