

Mrs [REDACTED]  
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1. I think the input of celebrities (footballers, etc) speaking out is very important. I also think literature, posters, etc, is a subtle education.
2. Not a lot is working well at present. One of the exceptions is Werribee Hospital and Western Health. While still far from ideal, I believe they are on the right track. The Parks facility in [REDACTED] is invaluable, as is their follow-up planning. Sending mentally ill people back into the same environment on discharge achieves little, and the continuing engagement with mental health workers is, I believe, crucial. (2) It is my experience that many GP's are ignorant of the signs and impact of a developing condition. This is an important area that should be looked at. Many will simple prescribe an anti-depressant and consider their obligation filled. No. In many cases the patient should be referred to a mental health specialist.
3. I have watched my bright, intelligent daughter struggle with anxiety and alcohol for over ten years. She has travelled the world, shared a coffee with Castro and has a gold pass to enter China any time she wishes. 8 years ago, she tried to take her own life. Our mental health system has been of almost no use to her or us since then. Yes, she saw psychologists and counsellors to no avail. Because she is intelligent and articulate I firmly believe she was never considered 'really ill' until recently, when she attempted to kill someone. NOW her illness is being taken seriously. But it should never have reached that point. She should have had psychiatric help 8 years ago. Doctors simple put her on anti-depressants that obviously did not work.

4. It is traumatic for already traumatised people to find help in the present system. And here again, I believe the GP's have a big role to play. They MUST recognise the importance of diagnosing potential mental illness. It may take just one visit to a mental health expert or facility to curb that illness and the resulting communication between GP and the mental health sector can be invaluable. For example..I had a quadruple by-pass 27 years ago and from that day my GP has been guided by my cardiologist. I see her once or twice a year and she directs my medications. Why is mental illness any different? It can be just as deadly as heart disease but receives nothing like the same treatment. No GP should play a guessing game with it. Our suicide rate is way too high for that to be acceptable.

And there is clearly not enough mental health facilities, or staffing of them, to cope with our needs. This MUST be priority for the Government. The cost of seeing a psychiatrist outside the system is way beyond the capabilities of most and this has to change. A friend in the country recently took her 17 year old grandson to the hospital fearing he would take his own life. The GP, agreeing the boy was in serious danger, responded by arranging a psychiatric appointment in 3 WEEKS time! Fortunately a family member stepped in and paid for private treatment. But seriously...*now you be a good lad and don't top yourself for 3 weeks!*

5. There needs to be Western Health models introduced across the state, especially in rural areas. And they need to be well funded. I have no doubt places like Park's will not only help prevent suicides but help with healing as well. Facilities like these allow everyone, patients and families, to take a breath and regroup. Although it was a battle to get into this system I'm now very grateful for it. It's the only light we have glimpsed for a long, long time. And the access to psychiatrists is another imperative. If not psychiatrists, then some arm of mental health. I have seen too many attending a GP for years 'suddenly' develop a mental illness. Diagnosing the early stages would not only prevent the illness escalating, it would cost far less of the tax payers money at a later date.
6. The only thing I can add is my belief there needs to be more community art projects for children. I personally turned 3 troubled teenagers around by making them believe they could 'create' something worthwhile. It works. One is now an archaeologist, one a sound engineer and the other a businessman. All came from poor, dysfunctional families and all returned to school. Music, acting, all are attractive to the young. Funding plays, songwriting classes, etc, could make a huge difference to a young, confused and unstable mind.