

I would like to contribute my story of mental health to the Victorian Royal Commission into the Mental Health System.

I wish to remain anonymous, if you could please keep my name, address, postcode, home town, phone and email details from being published or mentioned that would be very beneficial to my health and wellbeing. I don't want to be publicly identifiable as my attendance at the [REDACTED] Mental Ward was not kept in confidence as a neighbour (whose family member works in a police station) has made past insinuating remarks about my mental health.

I don't like the terms Mental Illness or Mental Health as it has the implication that I am sick in the head and there is no cure. It brings up negative connotations and that I am somehow different to other sane people. I am only using it for the sake of this submission letter.

I have been diagnosed with clinical depression, PTSD (sexual/emotional abuse) and have had previous suicidal thoughts/idealizations. I have been voluntarily admitted to the [REDACTED] Mental Ward once with the suicidal thoughts. I have had numerous anti-depressant medications. I have seen numerous health professionals including GPs, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists.

I would love the Mental Health System to change radically. I would love mental health professionals to realise that as their patient I still have other health issues that need to be addressed and explored and not to have them use the clinical answer to the effect of 'it's all in your head (i.e. somatic symptom disorder)'. I wish to hear instead, 'all of these other symptoms you're experiencing we need to investigate these further, there could be other reasons for your depression, etc..'. I have needed pain relief medicines in the past for physical disabilities but I was denied on the basis of my mental health records and named a drug-seeker.

When I saw some GPs they would refer me to other services, for example a psychologist. It would have been very helpful to have been told of the risk of re-trauma before using these services and perhaps given a list of all the available services in the area so I could feel like I had a choice. I remember at one point I had to fill out a 1 page questionnaire to gauge where my mental health was at, this form was woeful, there was no depth. For me the most important part of the GP visits were the face-to-face longer consultation times and the fact that it was bulk-billed. They were very helpful so I could discuss all my symptoms when I had a good GP.

I eventually suffered worse depression and other worrying symptoms from being on anti-depressants in the long-term. I asked many of the health professionals if these medicines could make me worse and nearly all said 'no', basically they said it was all in my head and wanted to increase the dosage, switch it to a different anti-depressant or prescribe more medications to countereffect the other symptoms. It would have been

good if professionals stopped giving conflicting advice and not bad-mouthing other professionals' decisions.

I was happy to stay in the [REDACTED] Mental Ward as it kept me from carrying out my suicidal thoughts. But I was very disappointed with most of the health professionals that 'cared' for me. I was made to re-tell all my sexual and emotional trauma as well as detailing my depressive episodes in front of several health professionals that I had never met before. It was of little comfort to have a support person with me in that room. I don't think this practise should be allowed in the Mental Health System. I was re-traumatised by it.

While in the Mental Ward I felt compelled to take my medications, I wasn't offered ANY choice in the decision-making. The staff watched me while I took the medicines and asked me to open my mouth. I felt like a child with no rights. It was and is implied that since I have a mental illness I don't think and act normally and therefore cannot be trusted to make decisions. This is extremely unfair and prejudiced. I would love to have been able to make decisions for myself. My partner was overwhelmed and didn't know what my rights and his rights were. We were given a leaflet on rights when I was first admitted but it was very vague and not helpful. Maybe it would have been beneficial if there was an independent professional in attendance to guide us, similar to a lawyer and their client.

After leaving the Mental Ward I eventually realised that I was suddenly registered with the judicial/police system as a low risk person. It was a deep emotional blow and I know of no way to redact this action. This decision just reinforced my view that mentally ill people are to be discriminated against.

I believe the whole Mental Health System needs to be totally reformed starting with an increase of the medical personnel and an improvement in their working conditions. I have too often heard these people talk of incredibly long working hours, not enough beds and not being able to take time off as there are no staff to cover for them. I have often felt like I am a verbal punching bag for these tired and stressed professionals.

I have mentioned of many instances where mental health professionals have failed me but I feel it is attributed to not enough staff, too many long working hours, non-supportive management, mis-use of funding and a resounding lack of accountability which in turn cannot be good for these professionals' mental health or mine.

Thank you for this opportunity, [REDACTED]