

Dear Sir,

I have left my name off this submission as I do not wish to publicise my identity. However, I am happy for the commission to contact me if needed using the information I have placed in the form.

Sir, I am a 67 fit and generally healthy farmers wife living in regional Victoria. My husband, a sheep farmer, aged 86yrs and still helping our son on the farm as he is able, had been going through a time of multiple illnesses, and at one stage completely obstructed at home (the ambulance an hour away).

As a previously well-trained nurse with intensive care experience I was well aware of the means to save his life and did so with help from our son. But the long stretch of illnesses and the stress and worry associated with it, and then the crisis of my husband's obstruction took its toll.

I spiralled into a depression that I would normally have picked up on having experienced it before but did not until the morning I was driving along our country road and was overwhelmed with a sudden urge to drive myself under an oncoming stock truck.

I managed not to do so but stopped the car in floods of tears frightened at what I had almost done. I rang our local medical clinic who wanted to send an ambulance straight to me, but I resisted, demanding that I "had" to get myself to help but needed them to know I was coming in. Once I arrived at the clinic I was not left alone. Someone sat with me the whole time before I was walked to the mental health clinic associated with the hospital.

Once there I was given a cup of tea, chatted with by friendly support staff and then driven to our home to collect clothing etc in order for me to be admitted to a psyche unit at another regional hospital. I was extremely distressed by this especially knowing my husband would be left without a carer, but staff gently insisted I needed help. And my husband was looked after by family on the farm.

I spent about 9 days at the hospital and was then offered the chance to attend a "PARC" unit, where with the amazing support of the staff I flourished and learned much about what had led to this episode and how to deal with it. It was also discovered, when I discussed symptoms, I was struggling with, that I had PTSD from an episode almost 30yrs ago and associated with the previous depression I had in Melbourne. At the time it was not picked up.

At PARC, a treatment plan was drawn up and I worked with staff willingly. I still occasionally have moments of panic associated with the PTSD but having been given the tools to deal with it I am doing extremely well.

That was December of 2018 sir, and now 12 months later I am still contacted regularly by Aged Care Mental Health staff to ensure I am OK. And they give the impression that they truly care AND have the time to do so. The care and support I have received from these folk cannot be surpassed in my humble opinion.

It was explained to me that one of the major reasons this is the case is because being regional and having smaller populations, we all tend to know each other, have a slightly different approach to life, and mental health support in the “bush” is less pressured than is possible in the very busy city units. The city units are overrun by huge numbers of patient needs, and struggle to keep up with the demand versus staff availability. It therefore tends to feel more like an “over worked sausage machine”. Sucked in one end (if you’re lucky) and spat out the other as soon as possible to make room for the next.

I can attest to that, having had the previous experience of depression in Melbourne where as soon as I was deemed to be “OK” I was “spat out of the system” and literally forgotten about as the staff tried to keep up with the other demands they had. Certainly, no follow up of any value. Yes, one appointment, which I kept and then let go.

I am sure there are many reasons why mental health care is failing, and I would not dare to offer you “cures” from my very narrow experience, but I will say this. The care I received at the medical clinic, the hospital, and PARC saved my life, and gave it back to me.

I will be forever grateful to these folk. And my hubby agrees.