

28 November 2019

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO MENTAL
HEALTH?

Re: Submission - personal

Dear Commissioners

I wish to ask that the Commission consider the impact of Aspergers syndrome and how it might contribute to suicide.

I suggested the Commission might seek expert advice from Florey Neuroscience Institutes' Melbourne Brain Centre, University of Melbourne.

I have since learnt of a report about Morbidity of persons diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, by Professor Julian Trollor, School of Psychiatry Operating, Faculty of Medicine, University of NSW. I have contacted Professor Trollor and believe he would be most able to provide expert advice about Aspergers syndrome and link to suicide.

I would like at this stage to give a brief account of the impact of mental illhealth on my family as there is an incidence of suicide and suicidal ideation in the family. My father, Les suicided in 2002 (age 73). My father had experienced mental illhealth over much of his adult life. It was only as adult did I appreciate how much my late mother Val had shielded myself and siblings from such.

My father was quite an accomplished man. He had begun as a junior clerk in the State Railways, and eventually served on the then State Transport Board. He was vice President of the Australasian Council of Salaried and Professional Association, Uniting Church lay preacher, keen gardener, husband and father. I mention this as illustrates the complexity of mental illness. He was first hospitalised around 45 years of age, and was periodically hospitalised until his death.

My father had always maintained private health insurance so went to either the Melbourne Clinic or Bundorra Private Hospital. My impression from my mother and the few times I had met his doctor was he received the best care available, was involved in decision making and acted on medical advice. He was on weekend leave from hospital at the time of his death. The risk of suicide had been considered by my mother, father and treating doctors. Neither my mother, myself or anyone in my family have ever questioned the doctors decision for weekend leave. At the time it viewed as a constructive step in his treatment. My mothers only expressed her anger at my father for choosing to suicide by stepping in front of a moving train as this must have traumatised the driver. Equally, my mother did not want anyone but closet family to know my father had suicided. I am sure such views of shame will not be unusual before the Commission. With regard my son, Nickf; he was 22 years of age when he suicided. He too placed in self in the path of a train. I am disturbed at the trauma the driver must have suffered. While it seemed futile, I did write to the Railway to express remorse on behalf of the family. I would like if the Commission might make special reference to the trauma experince by train drivers – which account for 1:20 suicides.

With regard my son, Nick, I was aware of a heightened risk of suicide. This was due to the incidence suicide and suicidal ideation in the family and other mental health conditions, the developing anxiety he had been experiencing, and grief due to his mother's death when he was a child. He was though highly cooperative with doctors and clinicians, consider advice from myself and older brother, and had no previous experince of self harm.

My own doctors provided me with good lay-explanation about the impact of Aspergers syndrome and how it might contribute to suicide. I have also read various accounts on such matters. I gather that the human mind's intellectual and emotional streams for those afflicted are less interconnected. So a person with Aspergers syndrome may experience feelings but less able to comprehend their meaning, let alone express them. They might also become trapped in impulsive behaviour and be less able to consider any alternative view. In the reading I have done most seems to refer to a study by the University of Gothenberg and the Karolinska Institute, University in Solna, both in Sweden. They describe actuarial studies which showed that those with autism die on average 15 years earlier than otherwise. The study also mentions that the principle causes of premature death are (1) epilepsy,(2) **suicide** and (3) Heart Problems and Cancer.

I have attached a copy of the ~~Coroners report~~ [redact] regarding my son, and a letter that I had provided my son's Counsellor to help in in providing family background.

Yours

Faithfully