

I would like to offer my experience in the Mental Health System and some areas that I feel need considering in the future.

I have experienced four admissions into the Public Mental Health Hospital in W.A. in the past nineteen years. One in 2000 and the three most recent were in 2017 & 2018. Two out of these four times I was sectioned under the mental act. I am very fortunate that I recover quickly and don't spend long in the hospital.

There are a few things I would like to put forward in this submission

1. Diagnosis & Treatment
2. Medication
3. The after care for someone going through a mental health condition

1. Diagnosis and Treatment

My feeling is that the initial treatment in the hospital was required to bring me back to a base line level, when there was a crisis. However, what I found when I was becoming more balanced was the differences in the ideas of the treating psychiatrists. For example in my last admission, One psychiatrist in particular told me that I had been treated incorrectly prior and this is how it would be going forward. When I endeavoured to express my views, I was shut down and told this is what is going to happen. Dr knows best!! In my opinion there was no consideration of my 50 years of life experience and my level of self-awareness and strategies that help me manage my condition. Fortunately for me, the second Psychiatrist I saw prior to discharge had different views of what was the best way to treat me based on my history. My case is considered very mild. The thinking was because my condition is short lived and I respond very quickly and the episodes are very infrequent, that the side effects and health issues associated with long term medication far outweighed the benefits of being on long term medication. Of course, in the future this may change, and I am willing to consider this. But for now, I agree with the Psychiatrist.

After my initial section, I went away wondering what happened to me and why. Which set me on a pathway of learning. Over the years I have found many ways to manage my condition by increasing my self-awareness and learning how to bring my system down when I become hypo-manic. with-out medication and now with the support of my psychiatrist I know how to treat the symptoms before they become problematic, with medication on an as needs basis.

I have had long term therapy and have a psychologist who I see on a regular basis now

2. Medication

I spent a 6 month period on anti-psychotics, my experience of these drugs was not pleasant. I did not feel myself at all. I put on 10 kilos in a short period of time which is a known side effect. I felt very unmotivated, indeed I said to my Psychiatrist, I felt depressed, but I didn't know if it was bi-polar depression or medication depression. My thinking and response time was slowed and I felt like I was pushing through mud all of the time. After coming off the medication, very slowly and under the guidance of my psychiatrist and Dr, I felt my true essence returning. I felt more and more myself every day.

I think, that we really need to consider each individual and look at the whole picture of their lives and also consider what medications are actually doing to people.

I also think, that we cannot under estimate the active steps that individuals can take to help themselves stay well.

3. Aftercare

After my first hospital admission in 2000, I was discharged from hospital, with one follow up session with the hospital before being referred back to my Dr for further care. I floundered around, trying to come to terms with my diagnosis. The diagnosis had rocked my world and I think that some sort of guidance towards support groups or peer support would have been helpful.

My more recent experiences, I was more aware and even though my world was turned upside down, I found my way. By seeking out my own support networks. I am pretty resourceful but feel people could really benefit from some guidance and support follow up. Even if it's just a phone call a couple of days after, weekly for a while and then monthly. Of course, each individual could decide if they wanted/needed this support.

As I have mentioned prior, I feel that I have a great level of self-awareness and have read many books on bi-polar since learning of my condition which have been a great education and helped me understand better.

If I feel off, I tell my family to keep an eye on me. And I know that if I am not sleeping and my mind is racing, I need to slow down, before I get to a point of no return. I have a few strategies that I use, which often work without medication and if I can't get things under control then I will use the medication as prescribed by my Psychiatrist. Hopefully, by doing this I will avoid future hospitalisations.

I would also like to add, that after reading my discharge report that was sent to my Doctor, many of the things I had told the mental health care team, were placed into the context of, it was because of the bi-polar. For in-stance one comment was 'admits to over investing', as if it was made whilst I was manic, where indeed my husband and I were very balanced when we made these decisions. When manic everything is jumbled and there was some truth or some link to real concerns that were voiced at the time but they were not accurate. I know it's difficult with confidentiality etc, but actually checking out with family the truth of things would be

good, to get accurate information, or a conversation after the fact to get things into the correct perspective.

I understand, that not every case is like mine and that the mental health system is under huge pressure. And I also look forward to seeing positive, holistic wellbeing plans in the future and hope that I can contribute to this.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and consider my perspective, I hope it is a helpful submission and I am happy to have a conversation to help clarify things or fill in the gaps.

Warmest Regards,
Michelle