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K A G Evans

MARDEN S A 5070

February 20th. 2011

Inquiry into caring for older Australians
The Productivity Commission
G P O Box 1428
Canberra City A C T.

Dear Sirs

Further to my previous letter on this subject I have been thinking that foremost in planning should be to keep these people in their own homes by support systems. There are two main problems that appear to rear their ugly heads one is providing a support system while the other is mobility and transport. Transport applies to both maintenance of supplies and support while it also applies to mobility.

One of the problems with older people is their inability to get to places for shopping and supplies and to do it safely. The other is to visit friends or service suppliers like doctors and even outpatient departments. The change in routine services has in fact reduced the freedom of movement of quite a large part of the community and not only for these services. One factor is the use of supermarkets for supplies as they quite often have poorly planned parking facilities but are at the centre of activity generally involving road junctions where there is lack of space for movement and access. The old corner shop has gone and convenience is nowhere to be seen while the convenience of parking space has been removed by narrow access and overcrowding. Quite a lot of the older convenience spaces are no longer available.

As I have already said there is little access for older people by public transport which is largely designed for cost efficiency. Locally I have seen bus routes altered because of other alterations to the transport system for new facilities and road spaces being used to provide different facilities and have soon been alarmed by the person responsible stating that the public has shown approval by the increased use of the facility indicating public approval. What they have forgotten to say is that some people now have to walk 1000metres to a find bus instead of 100 metres. All of these little things added to the reduced mobility of older people.

I can remember one nonogarian who lived by herself in her own home, did her own shopping and prepared her meals. When she reached her early nineties she found the car a little too much and tried to live at home with some distant family support. Very soon she was unable to cope like that entered a quite distant aged care facility where we found sitting in an invalid chair with everything that she used within reach. For her an interesting life was gone, she was too far distant for friends and slowly passed into the next life. One can not only blame this because she was over ninety.

One of the problems with public transport is that I can never remember being asked why I used public transport. As far as I can remember in my youth the timetable never changed. This was during the war years and I used to ride my bike to

school but when events meant that the cycle was not available I could rely on the time for me to catch a bus or tram was still the same. After a couple of years in the navy I did medicine and became a country doctor for 35 years. I may add that in the country there was no real public transport and in medical practice one generally drives. However since returning to live in Adelaide public transport has been one of my main types of exercise as the buses do come any closer and the stop is always a long way away. Trying to keep an appointment generally means catching the bus before and then there is always the walk at the end. I have been living in Adelaide for over 10 years this time and I do not know how many changes there have been. As I have stated previously one of the luxuries of the big city was the presence of orchestral music. I tried the taxi service for convenience but was a bit alarmed when they took the long way round and on one occasion nearly rolled the cab from a standing start at traffic lights on a 135 degree bend. But then they changed the times and the route which meant leaving too early and waiting or going the long way round. This has since been changed again and the convenience to concert times have been altered. I suppose one must remember that the 140 km trip to a concert was probably worth it but it is not worth having to leave a half hour earlier and walk a Km in the dark. If the applause lasts longer than other times, other complications come to the fore.

I do think that aged care should be tailored to the people being cared for and the reason for any service is to do the work that is necessary in the most advantageous way for the cared for with as much attempt to make the worker applying the care content with their work. I am not suggesting that it should be all one way but I do think that to attempt to encourage people into giving up their freedom to fit into a non rewarding occupation is wrong.

I can remember in Europe there were places provided for aged care that was almost unnecessary. It did seem that the attitude of the officials was more related to trying to do a job and good. I do feel that most of the cared for people are former taxpayers who in most cases have paid their taxes and seen other people rewarded for applying the tax. I think that most people in the community have paid their taxes and quite often not even known what advantages that this could bring. I think that to put demands on their care in later life to fit in with a political formula is wrong.

I mentioned earlier about the fact that when applying for home help for domestic work conditions were mentioned in relation as to what the state of the house must be for the occupier to comply with the terms of employment for this work to be done. My own experience was that in complying with the conditions it now took me twice as long to prepare the house to be cleaned under these terms that if I had been doing all the work myself as previously. Furniture could be moved as necessary when needed to clean the area. Under the scheme offered the furniture had to be moved as though one was moving house. When the cleaner had finished one had to then replace the furniture. As well as this the occupier had to be home while the cleaner was there. As her time of arrival was give or take thirty minutes it created quite an impost as well as the fact that the home occupier could not carry out normal shopping and home duties during this time and did not have the use of any part of the house and had to sit in the garden. I must again add we found our helper a very nice person who did not complain and did the work very well and to our satisfaction.

I must admit that I felt that this type of help was more like one would expect if imprisoned and I felt that my thoughts were my own peculiar reaction as usual. However a person in my family was attending meetings in association with another aged

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care support system and they discussed the problems that they felt with the present circumstances and what I am talking about came up quite often as an adverse comment on home help and keeping people in their homes.

The other point of problem I find is the use of sedatives and drugs containing sedatives and psychotropic drugs that are quite often used in older people requiring sedation. Most people in the community do not use sedatives or ask for them unless there are particular reasons. A lot of people who are given sedatives quite often ask for them to be repeated. This was a quite often recurring subject of discussion and sometimes appeared to be the main reason that older people sought medical attention. I am sure that occupancy and tiredness should be the answer to that. I must admit that I did not know that aged care facilities were not required to have medical backup for patients. This would explain why one of the Commonwealth Directors of Health visited me when one patient in another care facility was ordered 25 sleeping tablets per week. The reason was simple. The home required some spare tablets to help people sleep and they had asked one of the doctors for repeat prescription on the NHS. The home got sleeping tablets and no one had to pay. I did not know that the inmates could be given prescribed tablets in that way. I can also see that if the sleeping tablets were not simple sedatives then there could be repercussions with some older patients and changes in brain activity.

As an aging person having recently moved to town from my country occupation I do feel that there should be a better way of people seeking help to get the answers with regard to questions and to make it easier for older people to get to the place of information. It is possible that the application may have adequate information but some reasonable information should be available. One of the subjects that seems to be veiled in secrecy is what happens to the person's money in relation ongoing care and what happens to this money when and if they die while in care. I have known a number of people who have gone into care to find that the original basis of their care and subsequent disposal of their money has been changed by law while they have been in care. One must accept that it is difficult to know where to go to get information that allows ones withering brain to make a decision. Quite often the decision involves the family and previous offers and expectations. I think most of us do try to make sure that one's property and assets are saved in such a way so that they may be useful to the family. You have to also remember that people of my age were brought up during the 1929 depression and even those whose parents had employment were not very well off, some better than others. Most set out with the idea that they would save some assets or property so that with their departure they could have been looking after themselves and leave a little extra whereby their offspring might have a little something extra. It seem at the moment that the only children we have to leave the extra to is a government department because the law had been changed or the conditions of support changed without our being cognizant. One must accept that the death of a family member quite often leads to extra work and cost. which is generally carried out by a compliant sibling possibly with legal aid. The latter of course also has to paid from the estate.

I am
yours Sincerely

(K A & EVANS)