

Thuggery at the RBH

I often see “no win, no fee” advertising on the highway and still think regularly about responding. Some people suffer from PTSD, but I suffer from a PTS anger, which doesn't seem to be diminishing even now more than four years after the event. I don't know if people sue simply for apologies, but that has only ever been all I wanted, in writing from the man (or woman) in charge (of the Queensland Mental Health Unit).

The incident occurred on the evening of 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012. My son was 25 years old at the time. He had suffered increasingly from food intolerances for about 10 years. He had begun a career as a Deck Officer Cadet with an Australian shipping company and was engaged in delivering cargo up and down the Queensland coast. Unfortunately, the galley (dining room) atmosphere (odours, etc) was affecting his ability to eat sufficiently for the work he was doing. He disembarked that day and my wife, who was there to collect him, was dismayed to see he had lost quite a lot of weight. She took him immediately to our GP, who had been my son's physician for many years. She suggested that they go to Royal Brisbane Hospital for some “tests”. So my wife and son drove to the casualty department. Luckily, my wife had brought suitable food for my son, because they had to wait in Casualty for most of the afternoon before being attended to quite late in the day. I was out of town but communicating by phone, and drove directly to the hospital that evening, getting there about 6pm. Upon enquiry, I was ushered into a room at the back of Casualty where my wife and son were waiting alone.

They were completely in the dark as to what was happening and had been sitting by themselves for some time. Shortly after I arrived, though, a nurse came in and asked my son to take a pill. He asked what it was and was told it was a “muscle relaxant”. He then asked, as was his necessarily usual custom, what was in it. She said she did not know what was in the tablet. So he said that he would prefer not to take it. She said that if he did not take it he would be given “an involuntary injection” (exact quote). I straightaway realised that we were in a situation of duress and that this situation represented a real and immediate danger to my son's wellbeing. So we made an attempt to leave the premises.

The doors had been electrically locked behind us. I demanded they be opened. I was holding my son's hand and the staff tried to extricate him from me. A siren sounded and six hefty uniformed security people arrived, five men and one woman, five South Sea Islander types and one Caucasian. There was a scuffle and I was forced to the floor. Someone sat on me and my hands were handcuffed behind my back. My wife's arm was twisted and her cardigan was slightly torn. We were frogged marched from the building out to Gympie Road. The language used (myself included) was intense. I called them “f---ing thugs” and they told me “not to come f---ing back”. When the handcuffs were removed I was forcefully ejected out onto the footpath, my very distressed wife behind me.

My son was taken to Princess Alexander Mental Health Unit that night. We started a regular food drop for him the next morning. For the ten or so days he was there he ate nothing from the hospital menu.

Our efforts to extricate him from this situation started the night we were thrown out. We immediately contacted our GP, who phoned on our behalf and tried to explain our son's condition. We contacted a psychiatrist friend of the family who actually worked for the Queensland Mental Health Unit, but she had no luck either. The following day a specialist who was treating my son also tried but without success. I tried for days to contact the Head of the QMHU but he refused to return my call. I have never received any communication from that office at all. No one from the QMHU has ever apologised for our treatment.

I registered a complaint with the Queensland Police Service the morning after the incident. They investigated but the ultimate report was that due to an Involuntary Detention Order already being in place at the time of the incident I was the only one who could possibly be charged with assault.

I wrote to the local member who forwarded my letter to Lawrence Springborg, the then Minister for Health. Months later I got two very cold replies basically saying the system worked as it was supposed to.

I think I also made attempts to contact the Mental Health Tribunal before my son's release but cannot remember the outcome.

There are two central issues. Firstly, an Involuntary Detention Order should only be placed on people whose history indicates that they are a danger to themselves or others. Secondly, the placing of an involuntary Detention Order (and its implications) should be clearly communicated to the people directly affected by it.

That is my story. I would appreciate your opinion.

Sincerely,

Arthur Marcel