

Barbara Hocking Executive Director SANE Australia
13 May 2008
Subject: SANE Australia statement

Dear Michael

Many thanks for your message and attachments.

SANE Australia is pleased to make the following statement supporting your campaign about the undesirability of locking mental health patients down for extended hours.

In its 2004 Dare to Care report, SANE Australia expressed disappointment that the long-awaited 'forensic hospital' in NSW was to be built at Long Bay, rather than be a separate health facility (as with the Thomas Embling Hospital in Victoria, for example). This reflects the continued view of patients held at Long Bay as 'mentally ill prisoners' rather than people who have offended due to mental illness and require treatment in hospital.

While the new facility is yet to open, the 'locking down' of people with a mental illness detained at Long Bay for 18 hours a day is further evidence of this attitude.

The isolation of patients in regular mental health facilities is tightly-regulated and sparingly-used, in occasional circumstances relating to the health and safety of the person concerned or others. This practice acknowledges the potential harm to mental health and human rights violation of holding people in isolation for long periods, except for extreme circumstances when absolutely necessary for limited period. At Long Bay, on the other hand, it is apparently being used on dozens of people on a daily basis for reasons unrelated to their health.

SANE Australia shares the concerns of staff and patients involved, and urges the NSW government to 'walk the walk' as well as 'talk the talk' on mental health services for all those who need them, including people who have committed offences due to their illness.

I hope you will find this useful. Please let me know if we can help further.

Congratulations on your work in this area – we've still got such a long way to go haven't we?

Best wishes

Barbara Hocking
Executive Director
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