



## WITNESS STATEMENT OF KATERINA KOUSELAS

I, Katerina Kouselas, say as follows:

- 1 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, except where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe that information to be true.

### My story

- 2 I want to skip to the end: my husband Bill passed away on 22 January 2016. He ended his life. I believe the mental health system failed him, and it might be failing lots of other people we do not know about.
- 3 I met Bill when I was 18 years' old. We were so in love. We got married when I was 21 years' old. He was all I ever wanted in life.
- 4 Bill had depression for nine to ten years prior to his death, but we had no experience of the mental health system until the six months before he died.
- 5 He lost his job in the middle of 2015 and that started it all. I thought it was a good thing because he did not enjoy his work, but he took it deep and bad and could not come out of it. He was the breadwinner and it was a big shock to him. He was going to our neighbours and saying "my poor wife is working so hard".
- 6 Bill was home alone every day for six months. Bill could not get into my local GP because they had too many patients. Bill made appointments with the mental health triage centre and called Beyond Blue regularly. I would arrive home from work and there would be people in my living room talking to Bill. I think he called them because he did not want to burden me. A GP sent him to private psychiatrists, but they were a waste of money. No one helped.
- 7 Bill spent five weeks in an adult PARC service – they were amazing, they really included me. Speaking to the spouse is important, because I had been there for everything, and knew Bill and could describe how he was to them. It was also important for me to understand what they were doing for Bill. I was at the PARC every day. I did not leave Bill. Sometimes I wonder why didn't I just leave him at the PARC.
- 8 About a day after he left the PARC he started deteriorating. He was very anxious. It was like he was having a panic attack that would not stop. He was also doing an awful lot of

sleeping but then he would wake up and it was the same panic. He had been prescribed Valium which calmed him down a bit, but then he would sleep even more and wake up the same or worse. In all our years of marriage I had never seen him like that.

- 9 I wanted to take him back to the PARC but they told me that once someone has been released you go back to the bottom of the waiting list. I don't know how long the wait would have been but they said it wasn't good because he had already been through so many things – CAT teams, the PARC stay – they said it would be weeks at least and he would be at the bottom of the list.
- 10 So I took him to emergency. We had to go through emergency, which is something that concerns me. People who are suicidal should not be waiting in emergency with all the people with broken legs, you should be in a specialised area. Bill was very paranoid, and there were lots of people in emergency, people looking at him and it made it worse. His blood pressure was high and it is stressful in there. There are lots of other things going on.
- 11 The finale was the psych ward. Bill was put in there with people who were a lot worse than him. People with more extreme illnesses, some who might be really unpredictable. You don't always know what they will do, which is really hard for someone who is already very anxious. Bill was not out of his mind, he was just depressed, but they are all just put in there together.
- 12 I took Bill to emergency on a Sunday night. The following Tuesday the psych ward rang me and said "Bill is agitated and wants to leave". I told them I did not want him home if he is unwell. Of course I wanted him home, I loved him, he was my soul-mate, but I did not want him home if he was not well enough to be home.
- 13 But they said "*Katerina look, Bill does not look suicidal, we have given him psychosis medicine and he is ready to go home.*"
- 14 I thought, that is strange – he had never had that medicine before – but I trusted they knew what they were talking about. They never told me what drug they gave him.
- 15 I was there when they discharged him. They asked Bill four questions, he gave one word answers, and they sent him home. All they gave him was an appointment for two days later.
- 16 He came home and seemed on top of the world, and I thought this medicine is amazing.
- 17 But that Friday he killed himself.

- 18 I am one hundred percent sure that whatever that drug was they gave him, it changed him. He had been home alone for six months and not done anything and then a couple of days after they gave him the psychosis medicine, Bill took his own life.
- 19 I do not understand why would you not have procedures in place to monitor someone when you put them on new medication. You do not know how people will react and you should keep them there and monitor them for 24 or 48 hours. They do that for other medicines.
- 20 But I did not think to ask about that at the time. I would never have left him alone if I thought he was suicidal, the experts had said he was fine with the drug.
- 21 I still wanted to know what happened so I asked for the Coroner to look into Bill's death. I still have not got the report, but I hope it gives me some answers about what the medication was. I might get some peace in my life if I know what tipped him over the edge.
- 22 We had been married for 32 years when Bill passed away. I will never come to terms with it. We were together since we were 18, and we have a beautiful 30 year old daughter Natalie. It took my life away and my heart will never be ok.
- 23 No one understands it unless you have lost someone to suicide. It is very isolating. It is not like losing a loved one to something else. It is like you have a big sign on your back and no one knows what to say.
- 24 My daughter, my son-in-law, and my friends have been amazing together, but some people just don't know what to say. They avoid you.
- 25 Now I talk about Bill as much as I can, and I try to make people aware of suicide. It's my passion. I am hoping that with all of this information and just putting in some procedures, it might save someone else. I want people to know what it is all about, and hopefully how to prevent all of this. I do not know what else I can do to talk for Bill.

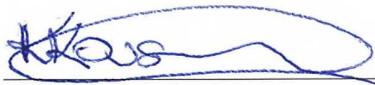
### **Potential Reform**

- 26 If someone is discharged from a care facility like a PARC but needs to go back in within a week, they should not go to the bottom of a waiting list. For Bill it was only a few days after he left the PARC and he needed help, but he would have had to wait, and he didn't have time to wait.
- 27 There should be procedures in place for monitoring patients when they have been given a new medication. I regret taking Bill to hospital because in hindsight all that

happened was waiting in emergency, then the psych ward, then they pumped him full of drugs, and then he left.

- 28 In psychiatric wards they put people with depression in with everyone else, it can make it worse. You could separate them out. I think it would make a huge difference if there was an emergency centre just for people with mental illnesses.
- 29 Families and carers should be given information, involved in the process, and listened to – they know the patient. A mentally ill person might say 'I am fine' but the family will know the truth. I wish I had known what to look for, I would never have left Bill alone if I knew what he might do.
- 30 My daughter took care of everything like the death certificate when her father died. I did not want to know the details of how it happened. But a few months after, I went to a GP for a referral to a psychiatrist. The GP wrote the cause of death on the referral. That was unnecessary – just saying suicide should be enough. Since then I have not been able to get that vivid thought out of my head. It is in the back of my mind constantly. I wonder if treating staff would act differently if it was for someone they loved.
- 31 I just hope that by talking about Bill, and by talking about suicide, it might help even just one other person. I hope that it helps to fix the system that let Bill down, a system that is letting other people down too.

sign here ▶



print name Katerina Kouselas

date

15/07/2019