

7.30 NEWS

Woman denied access to dying mother condemns 'monstrous display of evil' by nursing homes

7.30 By Lauren Day

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A West Australian woman who says she was banned from visiting her 91-year-old mother by two separate nursing homes shortly before she died has described the denial of access as "evil" and "unfathomable".

"I think it was an absolute monstrous display of evil by these nursing homes, sorry I won't call them nursing homes, this aged care facility," Linda McGough told 7.30.

Linda's mother, Greta McGough, was first moved into aged care in 2006.

Within 12 months, she had a range of healthcare concerns, from the staff's failure to treat pressure sores to a lack of available incontinence pads, which she raised with the Complaints Investigation Scheme.

The complaints were not upheld by the Federal Government body and Ms McGough was shocked by the facility's response.

"Within a week I started getting threatening and intimidating letters from senior management, even threatening to move my mother to another facility," she said.

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"That was September. That bullying and intimidation continued and [by] mid-December I finally lost my temper.

"There were other healthcare concerns that had arisen and I just became emotional — and I'm not proud of that, it's not within my nature to lose my temper, I'm a very placid peaceful person. And I was denied access."

After several months, Ms McGough managed to move her mother to another facility, but again had ongoing concerns about her care.

Complaints about an untreated eye infection were dismissed and Ms McGough said she found herself facing another ban on visiting her mother.

"The denial of access was just unfathomable, absolutely unfathomable," she said.

"That they would deny my beautiful mother — the one constant that had been there for her for 10 years. It's incomprehensible. That would be the highest level of bullying imaginable."

Three months later, after managing to negotiate three one-hour visits per week, her mother died weighing just 30 kilograms.

Ms McGough said it was devastating that she was not at her mother's bedside.

"I faced a period of darkness that was just immeasurable. I don't know how I put one foot in front of the other. It was just horrific," she said.

Both facilities Ms McGough attended said they were investigated by authorities and found not to have breached the Aged Care Act.



PHOTO: Linda McGough and her mother Greta (Supplied: Linda McGough)

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PHOTO: Linda McGough managed to negotiate three, one-hour visits with her mother per week before she died. (Supplied: Linda McGough)

'The system is broken and there's no fix in sight'

Aged care advocates say Ms McGough's experience is not unique.

There are more than 2,500 aged care facilities in Australia. Last year, 140 failed to meet accreditation standards, but only four had their accreditation removed.

The Aged Care Complaints Scheme receives around 3,500 complaints per year, but a report by the Australian National Audit Office said that number was low because many residents and their loved ones fear bullying and reprisals if they speak out.

Elder law expert Rodney Lewis said cases like Ms McGough's were increasingly common.

"I think it's fair to imagine the reports are just the tip of the iceberg," he said.

"When a family member — a close family member — leaves the home after seeing their relative who's a resident ... they simply don't have any way of knowing what's going to happen to their relative."

Mr Lewis said the system needed mediators and a major overhaul.

"From my point of view, as a lawyer who sees people at the end of their tether, it's broken," he said.

"The system is broken and there's no fix in sight that I can see."

Aged Care Minister Sussan Ley declined to be interviewed but told 7.30 an independent complaints commissioner would be in place to handle any issues from January 1.



PHOTO: Elder law expert Rodney Lewis says he sees "no fix in sight" for Australia's "broken" aged care system. (ABC 7.30)

Elderly should not be 'exploited, traded as commodities'

The website AgedCareCrisis.com receives regular complaints from relatives and staff about the quality of care in nursing homes.

Its founder, Lynda Saltarelli, said many of the concerns raised relate to aged care facilities cutting corners to try to increase profit margins.

"We are also concerned about the fact that aged care is being opened up more to an open market, and that also raises issues such as, does the community really want to have their loved ones in care where the primary focus is profits and not care?" she said.

"Vulnerable humans at this stage of their end of life should not be exploited or traded as commodities.

"Some aged care providers are listing on the stock exchange. These are providing rich pickings for uninterested shareholders or entrepreneurs looking to make huge profits out of aged care and there is a lot of money in aged care."

Greens senator Rachel Siewert said there should be a review of the level of Government funding providers receive.

"For a long time organisations and providers have been saying, 'We're not being properly funded to provide the level of care that people require'," she said.

"And so I do think there's an argument for a full cost-of-care study to look at whether providers are being funded enough to provide the level of care that people require."

Senator Siewert said any changes needed to be made before the system was under even more pressure as a result of the ageing population.

"If we don't deal with it properly, we will have a crisis and that's why we need to be dealing with it now, not when we have the larger numbers that are starting to enter aged care," she said.

Topics: health, aged-care, older-people, community-and-society, wa, australia

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Rachel Siewert, Greens senator

Contact Lauren Day