

NATIONAL AGED CARE ROYAL COMMISSION

Daughter's pain: she hoped dad would die in hospital rather than go back to Sydney nursing home

By **Julie Power**

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Shannon Ruddock had seen a good death: Her 54-year-old mother had died from breast cancer at Kogarah's Calvary Hospital surrounded by family and treated by palliative care experts who knew about death, dying and pain relief.

Eleven years later when her father Vincent Paranthoienne, 81, was diagnosed with terminal cancer – causing pain so bad he begged to be thrown under a bus – she hoped he would receive the same care, the Royal Commission on Aged Care Quality and Safety heard on Thursday.

But the six weeks he spent at Alkira Gardens aged care facility in Miranda after he was discharged from hospital were marked by untreated pain, and a failure by the nursing home to deliver palliative care, Ms Ruddock detailed in 90 minutes of evidence.



Shannon Ruddock's father's pain was neglected in a nursing home in Sydney's south. ROYAL COMMISSION WEBCAST

Her father was neglected because there were not enough staff at Alkira to care for residents with complex needs like his, she said.

Small movements would cause him to groan in pain, said Ms Ruddock who gave evidence at the hearing which is examining palliative care in residential nursing homes.

To prevent his "terrible breakthrough pain" – caused by an aggressive cancer, a spindle cell tumour – from continuing after he left hospital, his discharge papers prescribed Endone 5mg every two hours as needed, as well as Oxycontin and Lyrica.

Alkira Gardens had assured Ms Ruddock that they could provide her father with palliative care before he was discharged, she told the commission.

But when she asked her father if he was in pain, he "always" said "yes".

When a palliative care nurse Joshua Cohen from Calvary Hospital visited Mr Paranthoene at Alkira, he discovered the man's pain was rarely checked, and he had not been given any extra Endone.

"I burst into tears," Ms Ruddock said. "I said words to the effect of 'how hard is it to ask the question? How come they can't just ask my father if he is in pain?'"

Her father had a bad fall six weeks later, and ended up in Calvary Hospital where palliative care staff said he had entered the "active dying stage".

In contrast to Alkira, staff had an expert knowledge of dying, she said, and were constantly checking his pain. After he was stabilised, Calvary recommended that he should return to Alkira.

But she was so afraid that her father would die a "painful death" there that she begged the hospital to keep him.

"I spent most of my time hoping my father's condition would deteriorate rapidly so that the hospital would be forced to keep him and he wouldn't have to go back to Alkira," Ms Ruddock said.

She told the commission that she felt very guilty and angry for saying that, but she hoped that if he got worse it would protect him.

John Leong, the compliance and development officer for The Sisters of Our Lady of China Health Care Pty Ltd which operates Alkira and other aged care facilities, conceded there had been problems.

When asked about days when Mr Paranthoene had not been administered Endone, he said it was unclear whether this was "because there was no pain, or no pain assessment" had happened on those days.

Mr Leong conceded there were shortfalls in documentation, which had been rectified, he said.

Staff had subsequently been trained in the assessment of pain, and how to document that.

Alkira was also sanctioned by the Federal government for failing an audit on its accreditation. He also conceded that there had been a high staff turnover at the time.

Asked if the sanctions reflected very poorly on Akira, he agreed.

Commissioner Richard Tracey praised Ms Ruddock for the "extraordinary courage you have shown".

"Be assured that your story will well and truly be in our minds when it comes to making recommendations for improvement to a system, which obviously needs improvement," he said.



Julie Power



Julie Power is a senior journalist at The Sydney Morning Herald.
