

NATIONAL AGED CARE ROYAL COMMISSION

# 'I had no idea someone could do that': Hidden cameras reveal shocking secrets

By **Julie Power**

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When Noleen Hausler watched hidden camera footage showing a nursing home carer attempting to suffocate her defenceless 89-year-old father Clarence, she reported it immediately to the police.



Noleen Hausler detailed how her vulnerable 89-year-old father who had dementia was assaulted by a nursing home carer.

She also reported the assault to managers at Japara Mitcham Aged Care Home in Adelaide where Mr Hausler had lived since 2002.

However, rather than launching its own investigation, the Royal Commission on Aged Care Quality and Safety heard that Japara's staff instead threatened and attacked the messenger, Ms Hausler.

Japara's staff also deliberately misled Ms Hausler into thinking they were taking her concerns seriously, senior counsel assisting the commission, Peter Rozen, QC, told the Commission in Perth on Monday.

Later Japara wrongly accused Ms Hausler of stalking staff at the nursing home.

Japara also failed to report the assault on Mr Hausler to authorities within 24 hours, and when it did it got the date wrong by several months, the commissioners heard.

Foreshadowing evidence to come, Mr Rozen said the Commission would hear that this "cynical approach" by Japara's officers towards Mrs Hausler was not isolated.

Japara CEO Andrew Sudholz will respond on Tuesday morning.

A registered nurse, Ms Hausler said she had installed the small secret camera because she was concerned about the bruises appearing on her bedridden father. "Gut instinct" led her to believe that frail residents who were isolated in their rooms were being mistreated.

The commission watched hidden camera footage that showed the bedridden Mr Hausler being shoved, pushed, and physically assaulted. Food was forced into his mouth, and a napkin was placed over his mouth and nose seemingly to stop him breathing.

Ms Hausler said when she watched this video of her father being assaulted her hands started shaking and she went into a state of shock.

It was "terrible", she told the Commission. "I had no idea that someone could possibly do that. I felt for Dad in the fact that I didn't protect him sufficiently."

The carer, Corey Lyle Lucas, was later convicted of aggravated assault.

The Commission heard that Japara failed to tell workers what happened.

As a result, they treated Ms Hausler with suspicion, even calling her the "smiling assassin".

Mr Rozen, QC, detailed how Japara wrongly threatened Ms Hausler for breaching two aged care acts by installing a camera in her father's room.

It also accused Ms Hausler of "the serious criminal offence of stalking the staff at the nursing home" when she had done nothing of the sort, he said.

After Ms Hausler complained in late August 2015 about another incident where her father was treated roughly, the facility's quality care manager asked someone else to "okay" a letter in response, and date it a few days later, so that "it looks like we thought about it seriously".

In her written evidence, Ms Hausler said morale dropped and care deteriorated after Mitcham was bought by Japara in August 2014. Staff levels dropped and those who were there lacked enough training, especially dealing with patients with end stage dementia, she said.

Because of the lack of staff, bells rang loudly and incessantly while residents waited. Residents even called the emergency call bells, reaching upto 87 decibels.

When Japara took over, the standard of her father's care plummeted. His incontinence pads were limited to only three a day, water jugs were removed from rooms as a cost cutting initiative and food quality declined.

Reading out a message to the Commission, Ms Hausler called for increased ratios of registered nurses and trained registered carers.

Ms Hausler, who has been campaigning for video cameras to be allowed in aged care rooms, said she believed "extremely vulnerable loved ones" like her father deserved additional protection.

Outside the court, Ms Hausler told reporters having CCTV in rooms was a "no brainer" to ensure people were protected and said her father's case was not an isolated incident.

"[It's] very much a widespread problem in the sector for the fact that it happens all behind closed doors," she told AAP.

"These are the most vulnerable people that it's been happening to - they can't speak, they can't raise the alarm."

The royal commission will sit in Perth for five days.



**Julie Power**



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

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