

N. Shore Schizophrenia Society aims to dispel 'committal myth'

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For two years Halina Haboosheh waited diligently by the phone.

When she finally took a much-needed vacation it happened.

Her brother committed suicide, jumping off the Granville Street Bridge.

"It took me a year until I could talk about it," said Haboosheh.

Now that she's found her voice, Haboosheh is fighting alongside the North Shore Schizophrenia Society (NSSS) to educate families about committing loved ones before they become a danger to themselves and others.

Haboosheh's brother was diagnosed schizophrenic in his mid-50s. She'd attempted to have him committed 16 times in a 20-month period before his suicide.

"(His death) hurt me really hard," Haboosheh said. "Particularly that I did try so hard to get help for him."

NSSS president Herschel Hardin said some health care providers believe that the Mental Health Act requires an individual to be "dangerous" to condone an involuntary committal. In reality, the act allows for committal to prevent a person's mental or physical deterioration, he explained.

"Quite often we will run into some service provider saying we can't commit (a person) unless there is sufficient risk," Hardin said. "And the trouble with delayed atten-



IMPORTANT MESSAGE - Halina Haboosheh (right) and NSSSS president Herschel Hardin want to educate families about committing loved ones. *Rebecca Aldous photo*

tion is the change between being dangerous and non-dangerous can happen in a matter of seconds." The false notion that a patient must be dangerous in order to be involuntarily committed is deeply ingrained in Vancouver mental health service's approach, according to Hardin.

"If the act was implemented in the way it should be, it would prevent a lot of tragedy from occurring," he said.

Last month the NSSS sent a nine-page letter to the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority outlining the events leading up to Haboosheh's brother's death and asking for changes to "mental health management."

As requested by the society, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is investigating Haboosheh's brother case, the authority's spokesperson Anna Marie D'Angelo said.

"We are concerned about the sweeping generalizations that are made in the letter but we take all complaints seriously," she said.

D'Angelo noted that doctors and psychiatrists are responsible for involuntary commitments and in doing so they must follow the mental health act.

"It is not Vancouver Coastal Health administrative's call - it's the doctor's call and really if doctors don't do what they are supposed to do they are actually liable," D'Angelo said.

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