

VANESSA'S LAW ***Paediatric Patient Oversight***

Labor Failure

Vanessa Anderson died at Royal North Shore Hospital on 8 November 2005 after being hit in the head with a golf ball.

The Coroner, in delivering his findings regarding her death, described it as *“a tragic and avoidable death ... Vanessa’s case should be used as a precedent to highlight how individual errors of judgment, failure to communicate, failure to record accurately and poor management of staff resources, cumulatively led to the worst possible outcome for Vanessa and her family... the Government of the day has the responsibility to provide adequate resources, training and staff to ensure the delivery of appropriate and timely medical services to the residents of New South Wales.”* Deputy State Coroner Carl Milovanovich, Coronial findings

Solution

Children are not small adults and as such a more specialised type of care is required. This is why we have paediatricians to look specifically at the health needs of children.

In the wake of the tragic and avoidable death of 16-year-old Vanessa Anderson, the NSW Coalition’s Shadow Minister for Health Jillian Skinner introduced a Private Members Bill to NSW Parliament to ensure a paediatrician has oversight of a child’s treatment if they are admitted to an adult ward.

Proposal

The *Paediatric Patient Oversight (Vanessa’s Law) Bill 2008* will require a paediatrician to have oversight of children and adolescents (aged 18 and under) who are admitted to adult wards in the 13 teaching hospitals and 12 rural base hospitals.

This would require the on-duty or on-call paediatrician to check the medical management of such a child within the first 24 hours of that patient’s hospitalisation.

It would apply to children and adolescents who are admitted to a general mixed, medical or surgical ward and would not apply if they are in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or High Dependency Unit (HSU).

If this Bill were in place when Vanessa was admitted to hospital, she may still be here today.

Figures obtained by the NSW Opposition under Freedom Of Information show 1,102 children under 16 were admitted to adult wards in hospitals in a single area health service* in 2007 alone. (*North Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service)

Paediatricians specifically look after the health needs of children, and there’s no reason a child’s treatment should slip off the radar if they are admitted to an adult ward.

Jillian Skinner introduced the Vanessa’s Law Bill into the NSW Parliament in November 2008 and will call on NSW Labor to provide bi-partisan support and vote in support of the Bill this year to ensure children and adolescents who are admitted to adult wards get the specialist treatment they need.

This Bill will be Vanessa’s lasting legacy, to ensure children get the specialist treatment they deserve.