

October 13, 2006

## **OPINION EDITORIAL**

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CEO, Carers SA**

It's a sad state of affairs when it takes an assault and attempted suicide for a family to be heard and action to be taken.

The story of the Cronin family (The Advertiser, Friday, October 13), whose constant pleas for help in caring for their blind, autistic, epileptic and mute adopted son Richard fell on deaf ears, is a tragic reminder that we still have a long way to go when it comes to providing adequate support services for those caring for loved ones.

Like John Cronin, there are thousands of carers of all ages who feel helpless and desperate and don't know where to go or who to turn to for help. For many, the problems lies with the health system and its people who aren't properly educated or trained about the issues associated with the caring role.

As the peak body for family carers in South Australia we're pleased the State Government has made the commitment through the Carers Policy launched recently to provide more recognition to carers in the community, however it's now time for the health community to follow the Government's lead.

We need to ensure the health professionals and general public not only recognise their important role in the health system but take action to provide support measures that allow them to cope with their caring responsibilities.

For too long carers have been invisible in our society which is hard to believe considering they save the Federal and State Government a combined \$19.3 billion a year by keeping loved ones out of formal health care.

The biggest issue for carers is recognition, particularly from health professionals, many of whom do not include them in consultations with the patient as their primary care provider.

Health Professionals such as GPs and other allied health workers and community service staff need to be provided with a comprehensive information pack concerning the issues facing carers and their needs, combined with adequate training.

Another key issue is training for carers to help them to manage their caring responsibilities. Traditionally the focus has been on the patients, but just as important is the carers' own health and wellbeing. It's critical that our carers are provided with services that give them both practical and emotional support and also give them a break from their caring role.

We want to see the policy flow through at every level from the GP consultations to the local community and health service and this will only be achieved with a holistic approach to the issue. which is now gradually being addressed.

National Carers Awareness Week, which kicks off on October 16, provides a national focus for carers and aims to highlight and address the issues facing carers both now and in the future.

*“Anyone Anytime”* is the theme for this year’s National Carers Week. Becoming a carer is usually unplanned and unexpected and can happen to anyone of us at anytime.

This year’s theme is designed to demystify the role of carers and to address the concerns of those who might suddenly find themselves looking after a family member or friend with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged.

We’ll continue to represent our state’s 227,700 family carers but more needs to be done to help them in their roles so they don’t feel isolated as was the case with John.

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**Further media information: Please contact**

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