

Media statement from Rick Hampson 20 August 2024

This morning the Coroner handed down her findings for the inquest into the death of our beloved son Dougie Hampson. Losing our son was the hardest thing we have ever been through, but going through this inquest was a close second.

It was the third-year anniversary of Dougie's death only four days ago. It has been three years of agony for my family living without our son. Every day has been hell for us, I struggle to get up. I struggle to breathe but we carry on in the hope that we get justice for our son. After three long years of fighting for justice and change, we feel that we are finally on the path to justice after receiving these findings and recommendations. But we will never heal fully as a family until we receive justice for Dougie. This is only the beginning – there can be no healing without justice.

All recommendations made by the Coroner should be legally enforced, to make sure they're followed through. Getting these reforms won't bring Dougie back. Nothing will do that. If we can save the lives of other First Nations people by getting these reforms through, it will go some way towards healing the pain my family and I carry inside us. We don't trust the healthcare system because this system kills our people. It doesn't heal.

The Coroner has made a finding that my son's death was preventable – he didn't have to die. If Dubbo Base Hospital had just done their job, he would be here with us today. A lot of Black fellas don't normally go to the hospital, because of the track record of the health system in this country.

We are scared to go to hospitals. Our fear is real. Just look at what happened to our beloved son. He was terrified of hospitals, but he still went to Dubbo Base Hospital that day because he knew something was seriously wrong. And what did he get in return – his worst fears became a reality. Dougie walked out of that hospital with a death sentence because he was ignored and treated so poorly - by the very people that should have saved his life. He died alone and without his family. And he died, even though he did everything that a patient should have done.

Me and my family are so outraged at the thought of Dougie being surrounded by so many doctors, nurses and medical professionals for 19 hours, who had the skills, resources and knowledge to save his life. He spent those many hours in that hospital, scared, alone, without his family, in pain while the doctors and nurses were failing to do their jobs! Shame on Dubbo Base Hospital! That is the reality of being Blak in this colony. The hospitals in this country kill Aboriginal people, that's the reality our mob live with every day. Dubbo Base Hospital should have saved our son's life, instead they killed him.

The Coroner made findings that the care and treatment Dougie received at Dubbo Base Hospital was inadequate and below standard at every stage of his stay at Dubbo Base Hospital.

- Dougie was failed at triage, diagnosis, treatment and discharge,
- He was failed when he was misdiagnosed with Cananbinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome,
- He was failed when they wrongfully administered droperidol,
- He was failed when they ignored his pain and his worsening symptoms,
- He was failed when they didn't order further scans and testing,
- And he was failed when he was discharged while in pain and without seeing a doctor.

There was nothing that Dubbo Base Hospital did right during those 19 hours. The doctors and nurses at Dubbo Base Hospital failed at every opportunity to treat Dougie correctly. It's atrocious. Dubbo Base Hospital should be ashamed.

They should be embarrassed by how poor the standard of care is. They should be appalled at the state of the treatment they provide Aboriginal people. And this is a hospital where 30% of the patients are Aboriginal.

My message to Dubbo Base Hospital is this: think long and hard about how you are hurting your patients, especially First Nations mob. The poor standard of care at Dubbo Base Hospital is what killed my son and is the reason why my family are suffering with grief and heartbreak. Everyone working in the health care system in this country should reflect on the reality of the care you are providing to First Nations people. Reflect on the hurt you are causing so many Aboriginal families.

The reality for my family is that our Dougie died. He died because the hospital didn't give him the BASIC health care he deserved. Stomach ulcers are not a complicated medical condition. Ulcers are common and very easy to treat. Dougie should have walked out of that hospital on the way to recovery. He should have lived a long and healthy life, with us, with his children and grandchildren. Instead he walked out of that hospital to his demise.

There is no healing without justice, and justice will only be served when an Aboriginal person can walk into a hospital in this country without being scared that they might never walk out.

The Coroner has made the finding that one doctor in particular – Dr Nushaj, that his conduct while diagnosing and treating Dougie was below standards for a senior doctor. I think it is disgraceful that Dr Nushaj, a senior doctor with six years of experience working in the Emergency Department made a diagnosis of Cannibinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome, without knowing the symptoms and cause of the condition – what a scary thought.

The experts gave evidence that one of key symptoms of this medical condition is vomiting and nausea, that's what hyperemesis means. It's literally in the name. Dougie told the doctors that night that he didn't have any nausea or vomiting and Dr Nushaj admitted that he knew that Dougie didn't have those symptoms. Dr Nushaj diagnosed our son without considering ANY other possible diagnosis. He didn't make any record of his examination of Dougie, or of his incorrect diagnosis, or of his order to administer droperidol, a very serious sedative.

How can we trust the health system to treat us properly and how can we trust the doctors if this is the standard of their practice. The Coroner has found that Dr Nushaj's treatment of Dougie was so poor, he is being referred to the HCCC. Dr Nushaj is a bad doctor. His actions show that he is. The evidence in this inquest has shown that he is. And this referral to the HCCC shows that he is.

In my opinion, based on the Coroner's findings, Dr Nushaj shouldn't be treating Aboriginal patients, he shouldn't be treating patients at all. There is no justice without healing, and healing for my family is seeing Dr Nushaj being held accountable for his poor conduct as a doctor.

Let this inquest be a warning to all doctors in the country – you cannot get away with treating patients poorly, you cannot get away with not doing your job properly. These hospitals and doctors keep using fancy words to describe racism - cognitive bias, anchoring bias, early diagnostic closure and colourblind bias.

They can use whatever term they want at the end of the day it means blackfellas get killed in the health care system. And that's racism. We know what racism is. Better than any person, court or institution in this colony, because we face the ugly truth of racism every single day, and every time we walk into a hospital. We define racism by the outcomes and impacts our mob experience. And the truth is that Australia's health care system is rotten to the core with racism.