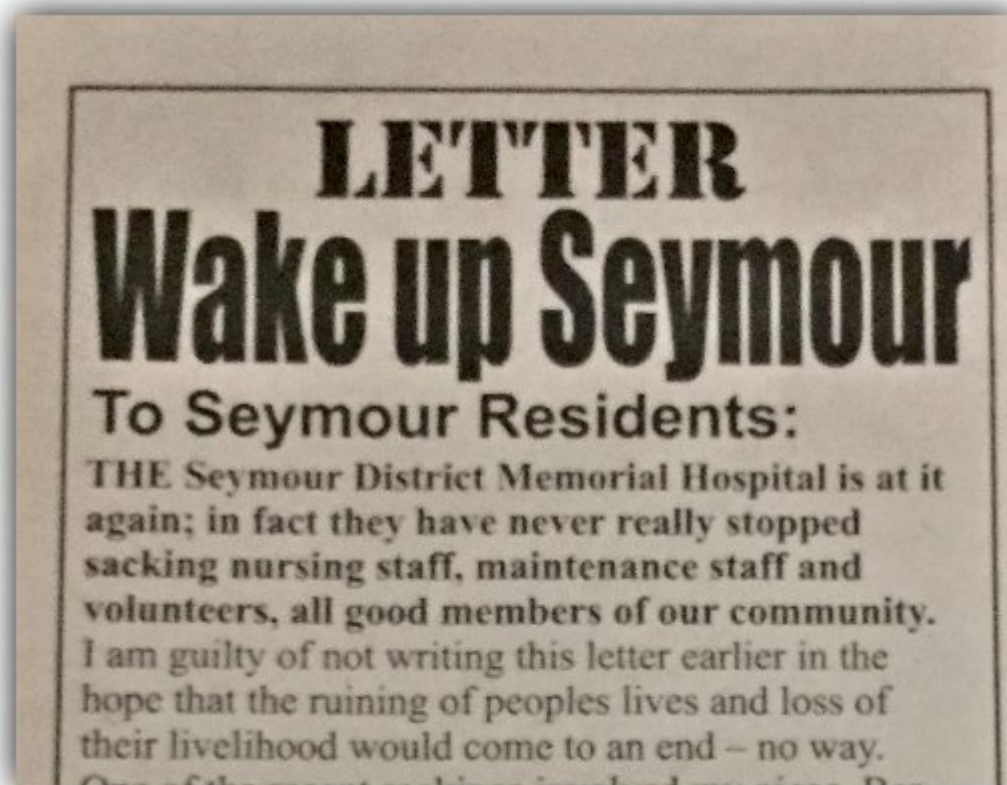


Lyndoch board: Seymour sounds a warning on staying silent

Description



One of the many letters written to the local newspapers about the crisis at Seymour hospital that came to a head during the tenure of former CEO Doreen Power.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

If we need a canary in the coal mine about [what is unfolding](#) at Lyndoch Living, it's what happened at the Seymour hospital earlier this decade.

Seymour hospital was plagued with problems in the early 2000s, with a string of doctors resigning, a loss of birthing services, a dysfunctional board, and four official inquiries into the mess in less than two years.

Into this crisis came Doreen Power, who was appointed CEO of Seymour Health in 2007 and left in 2012, during which time the hospital saw many changes and the small town of 7000 people virtually imploded.

Ms Power, who is now CEO of Lyndoch Living, was hired by the Seymour hospital to get things done and she did: birthing services were resumed, the doctors came back to work, and the hard-working staff at the hospital continued to provide the best services that they could.

But behind the scenes of all this “success” was a human train wreck of broken, dis-spirited people, many of whom were allegedly treated so appallingly that they are only just starting to recover and some say they never will.



A record crowd poured into the Seymour football clubrooms in July 2012 to hear what would be done about multiple problems at the hospital.

I have spoken to many people from Seymour about this period and the same stories are repeated over and over:

staff being bullied, losing their jobs for no reason, being “marched off the premises” without warning, hounded over minor issues, feeling disempowered, afraid, depressed and having “nowhere to turn” because the board either wouldn’t listen, or wasn’t told.

This sounds frightening familiar to what is [now allegedly unfolding at Lyndoch Living](#).

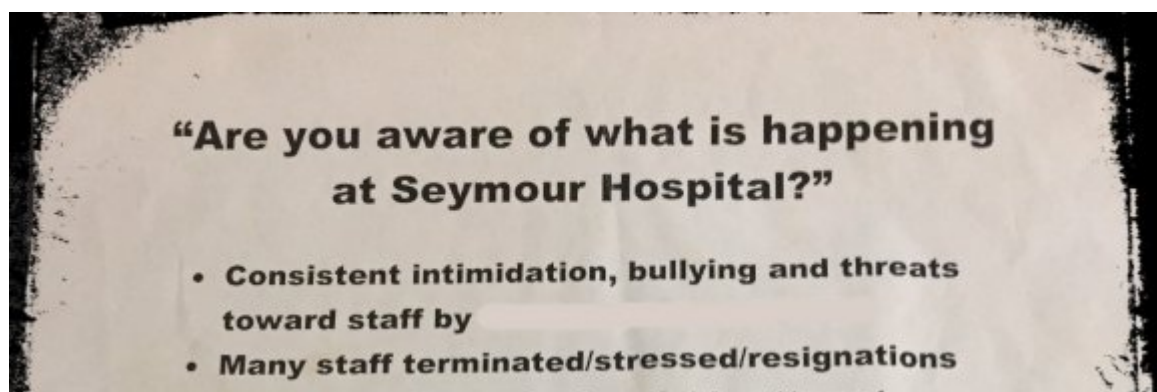
“People became severely depressed and traumatised and felt there was nobody who could help them,” said one Seymour woman who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

“There was a sense the board had been hand-picked and they wouldn’t help. You were told if you approached the board, you would be dismissed...if you wanted to keep your job, you had to shut up.”

In desperation, some staff organised a Seymour version of an underground resistance by wearing green ribbons to work as a sign that they were a “safe” person to approach if you were being bullied.

Can you imagine?

The terrible reality for these Seymour staff is nobody from the hospital board stepped up, staff were too scared to speak up, and the damage rolled on until the wider community was alerted to what was happening.



A portion of the anonymous letter drop sent to residents of Seymour in 2012.

An anonymous letter drop was circulated throughout Seymour in early 2012 and local state MP Cindy McLeish, now deputy Opposition leader, was bombarded by people pleading for her to intervene.

Ms Power resigned as CEO in May 2012, just two months before Ms McLeish organised a public meeting that was held in the local footy clubrooms before a capacity crowd of more than 300 people. Nobody from the hospital executive showed up.

Neither Ms Power or the executive, however, escaped the wrath of the crowd.

“The meeting saw pent-up community frustration released about perceived high staff turnover at the hospital, allegations of bullying, a “toxic” workplace, former chief executive Doreen Power and the change from a community hospital to a ‘bean counter mentality’ among other things,” the *Seymour Telegraph* reported.

Seymour GP Dr Elliot Jarman was among the passionate speakers in the audience. He was quoted by

the paper as saying:

“Over 25 years Seymour Hospital has evolved to provide first-class services. I’m proud of that. What I am not proud of is staff absolutely in tears, intimidated...what’s happening is (wrong).

“I’ve been to the courts, I’ve been to Worksafe...(they’re) unable to help. I’ve been seeing patients and my fellow colleagues in tears. It’s just not right. Our services are being damaged by the current management style.”



Another Seymour GP, Dr Rob Peterson, told the meeting that three core issues needed to be addressed immediately: improved communications from the board to staff, allegations of bullying, and low staff morale. Bang, bang, bang.

By the time of the town meeting, it's understood up to 50 staff had left the hospital, either from being pressured or being fired, and a string of Fair Work claims that followed – I believe up to 14 or 15 – have only recently been finalised.

“It broke this town and I don’t think it has ever fully recovered,” said one Seymour source.

Seymour ultimately had an intervention, with a ministerial appointment made to the hospital board to report back to then Health Minister David Davis.

By the end of 2012, the hospital chair had resigned and most of the executive team had been cleaned out after their positions became untenable.

As a local blogger, *Seymour Dreaming*, wrote: “why has the board been conspicuously silent when the community expressed concerns over controversial events for which it was ultimately responsible?”

Why indeed?

And then this, a heart-felt letter to the paper from resident, Janet McKenzie, which says it all:

“The (hospital) board...and past and present executive staff need to be accountable for the shame, hurt, stress and humiliation that has been placed on these staff and their families.

They deserve so much better treatment, as do volunteers who have so generously given their time...

These staff and volunteers must receive an unconditional apology and compensation/reinstatement for the treatment they have received at the hands of (the hospital).

It is not acceptable that is ignored as these are staff and volunteers who have given many years of unblemished, caring and passionate service..

Finally, I, like many other family members of the above staff will be there to give support, assistance and much needed emotional care to those that the (hospital) has abandoned.”

The canary is coughing at Lyndoch Living and I hope the board is listening, because this management style hasn't happened just once before, but twice.

Next: Plenty Valley.

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5. bullying
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8. community meeting
9. concerns
10. culture
11. doctors

12. Doreen Power
13. Kerry Nelson
14. Lorraine Mielnik.
15. Lyndoch Living
16. nursing home
17. Percy Eccles
18. Peter Downs
19. Plenty Valley Community Health
20. residents
21. Ron Page
22. scrutiny
23. secrecy
24. Seymour
25. Seymour Health
26. staff issues
27. Sue Cassidy

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