

My husband, [REDACTED], took his own life just over one year ago, leaving myself and our three children absolutely heartbroken. Our children were only two, six and seven at the time. There were no clues that he would do this, none. We were not living with depression. In fact, I do not believe my husband was suffering from depression at all.

After his death, the process of identifying his body, awaiting an autopsy and arranging his funeral were all a blur. I basically just went along with the advice of the police who were dealing with the case, counsellors and funeral directors.

As soon as the police told me that they had found my husband's body, I immediately asked to see a counselor before I told our children. This counselor was great. He gave me the advice I needed and in the hours and days afterwards spent some time with myself and my extended family trying to give us some insight into suicide. I listened intently to all his knowledge around the subject and it centered primarily around depression, which is the most obvious cause of suicide. It just didn't make sense in [REDACTED]'s case. He was not depressed. Although we had been under some pressure, it was nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing that I would believe would cause somebody to take their own life. This fact made it very difficult for me to understand and process.

After a few months I sought the help of a psychologist to help me get to a mental state where I could return to work and provide a happy life for my three children. After one session, this psychologist asked if I ever considered that perhaps [REDACTED] was suffering from some kind of degenerative brain disorder, for example early onset dementia (my husband was only 43 when he died). It took me by surprise at first but once he started listing some of the symptoms, it actually became very clear that yes, [REDACTED] had probably been suffering from something like that for some years with it becoming more evident in the weeks leading to his death.

We discussed this further and he explained that if that was the case, it could very likely be genetic. It was then that he asked whether any tissue samples had been taken at the time of [REDACTED]'s death. I was unsure but was quite hopeful that they had, as I was told that an autopsy had been undertaken after [REDACTED]'s death and as I have never dealt with such matters before, I just assumed that an autopsy would involve an internal examination.

I contacted the Coroner's Office to obtain [REDACTED]'s autopsy report. Despite it being the most heart breaking, soul destroying document I have ever read, and one which I hope my children never read, it was also disappointing for it was then that I discovered that autopsies do not always have to be in the form of an internal examination. In the case of my husband, it was obvious that he had caused his own death by hanging and as such an internal examination was not deemed necessary.

I am very aware that it is too late for our children. However, I strongly believe that it would benefit other families, suicide prevention and brain research in general, if at the time of suicide, the family of the deceased were given the option of tissue/brain samples to be kept for testing either at the time or at a later date.

If [REDACTED] had been suffering from a brain disease, and we knew it was genetic, I would then be better prepared in raising my three beautiful children. I have read that children who have a parent that has

committed suicide are 50% more likely to do the same. This is information I just cannot bear to read. If something as simple as taking a tissue sample at autopsy and giving the deceased's family the option of testing it for genetic disorders means that that statistic improves, then I believe it is worth doing.

I would like to see changes made nationally to autopsy procedures following suicide. I would like changes made so that families of the deceased have the option for further testing of brain tissue, either at the time of death or at a later date. This can only be achieved if a tissue sample of the brain is taken as part of an autopsy. This additional step will not only deliver a very important option for families, but over time it would provide valuable information into brain, genetics and suicide research in Australia.

I would appreciate your advice on how we could progress this matter and enforce this simple procedural change for suicide related autopsies across all Australian states.