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NEWS

Lack of beds linked to mental health deaths

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The need to retain mental health facilities at Rozelle Hospital was highlighted by the release of NSW Health's Tracking Tragedy report, a mental health professional has claimed.

The report, which examines suicides and homicides following hospital discharges, studied 10 mental health patients who had committed murder – three after not receiving adequate treatment – and 113 who took their own lives.

Inadequate bed numbers were a recurrent theme in the report, which found that about one-third of the suicides could have been prevented by better care, while pressure on beds may have led to premature discharge of three persons who later committed homicide.

Dr Jean Lennane, a former psychiatrist at Rozelle Hospital, has slammed NSW Health over its decision to close Rozelle Hospital when its own report suggested more hospital beds were needed to treat mental health patients.

"There is an increasing amount of evi-

dence that a lack of hospital beds are contributing to deaths and the Government is still closing Rozelle Hospital," she said.

"Really what they need to do is just grab this opportunity to increase the number of hospital beds by upgrading Rozelle Hospital in addition to the facility at Concord Hospital."

Because of the lack of beds available to mental health patients many were not admitted until they were "completely and violently dangerous," she said.

Key findings in the homicide cases found that liaison with police was "sub-optimal" and not all referrals by courts for psychiatric assessment were reported adequately.

It also revealed inadequate follow-up, clinical care and support of some high-risk patients of mental health services led to fatal consequences.

Key findings in the suicide cases found that in about half of the cases where a person was identified as a parent, child safety was not documented, and that about two thirds of assessments were not seen by or discussed with a psychiatrist.