

Working Together to Support the Mental Health of Injured Workers

Matt is a 24 year old customer service representative who was both physically and verbally abused by a customer whilst at work. The customer became irate when Matt refused to offer a further discount on a crystal bowl that was already heavily reduced. The customer shouted profanities, threatened to kill him, chased him behind the retail counter, punched him in the face and then threw the bowl, which shattered on the wall behind Matt. During the altercation, Matt lost his balance and fell heavily on his right arm.

Security arrived quickly and apprehended the customer. The police subsequently arrested and charged the customer.

Matt immediately consulted his GP at his employer's suggestion. An x-ray found that he had a fracture in his right forearm which was plastered at the local hospital. He was certified as being temporarily unfit to attend work.

When Matt provided his statement to the police he learned that the customer had previously been charged with serious assault.

Matt saw a local counsellor recommended by his employer, however he did not find these sessions particularly helpful and eventually switched to someone suggested by one of his mother's friends. At his two week GP follow-up appointment he reported ongoing pain. He asked for more pain medication and said that he had been unable to sleep since the incident, but had not taken any medication for this or for his mental health in general, despite it being suggested by the GP to help him cope with the incident's psychological impact. Upon questioning Matt revealed that his mum insisted that taking medication for mental health issues was *"no use"*. However, she did encourage him to take medication for the physical pain whenever necessary. Matt said that his mum had a cupboard full of *"pain meds"* at home that she had been prescribed on various occasions.

At a review six weeks after the injury, Matt told his GP that he was finding it hard to do even simple things like walking his dog and buying groceries from the local shop. *"I hate having to rely on Mum to do everything, but I just don't feel up to doing much of anything."* Matt continued to complain of pain but the GP didn't observe any deformity and there was no loss of sensation in the arm. Matt also said he felt *"very shaky and sweaty at times"*. He said that he hadn't seen his mates for weeks and whilst he didn't mind playing computer games, he didn't find enjoyment in much else. Matt went on to say that he was still having trouble sleeping. *"It takes me ages to get to sleep and when I finally do, I have nightmares about seeing the customer again. Sometimes I replay the incident over and over, and sometimes I dream that the he confronts me at the supermarket. I hate going to bed now because I know I'm going to have nightmares..."* The GP suggests a mild sedative for a few weeks, but Matt still resists.

**Mental Health
Professionals' Network**

Emirates House
Level 8
257 Collins Street
Melbourne
VIC 3000

postal
PO Box 203
Flinders Lane
VIC 8009

email
contactus@mhpn.org.au

telephone
1800 209 031

www.mhpn.org.au

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MHPN WEBINAR CASE STUDY

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A friend told him that his assailant lives near the shopping centre where he worked. Learning this, he had his mum sell his car. He told her that he was scared the bloke knew his car and would be able to track him down if he saw him driving it.

At a review 12 weeks after the injury Matt reports that over the past few weeks his employer had sent some text messages pressuring him to return to his full-time role, which he had not answered.

The day before his GP appointment, his employer advised him via text that his role had been filled; however, there was an equivalent role at another store. This store was a long drive for Matt. He had been unable to drive since the incident, unless accompanied by his mum or a close friend. He told the GP that he didn't feel up to going back to work at this point even though alternative worksites were available because they all involved working in a large shopping centre and he didn't feel that he could cope with returning to that kind of environment.

He also told his GP that he had seen a number of other GPs to try and find a doctor who understood his condition, the ongoing pain he feels and his rehabilitation requirements. He said all the doctors he saw wanted him to ***"take pills to help him cope psychologically"*** but he had still resisted this.

Upon questioning, he said he drank occasionally, but not usually to excess. He said that before this work incident, he enjoyed ***"catching up with friends at his local to enjoy a few beers and listen to a band"***. He said that he had used marijuana on the odd occasion and that he has used it a few times since the work incident because it helps to relieve the pain. He also said that he feels that there is more that is wrong with his arm than he has been told.

Prior to the incident he had started seeing a girl from work and the relationship was progressing quite well, but over the past few months it had fizzled out and apart from the odd text, he barely had contact with her.

Before the incident, Matt had enjoyed good health and only visited his GP for minor complaints. There was no known history of mental illness, however Matt has a learning disability (dyslexia) which had impacted his education and he did not possess any tertiary qualifications.

At the conclusion of the appointment, Matt asks the GP for a new medical certificate, giving him some more time off. He says that he knows he can't return to his old job, nor does he want to, but that he is fearful of going to a new site and is ***"really worried about what will become of him"***.

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