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 He died in agony - Wife accuses hospital of killing husband
 By health writer CLAIR WEAVER

DON Mackay spent the last five weeks of his life with his arms tied to a hospital bed, whispering "help me" and valiantly trying to chew through breathing tubes so he could die with dignity. The 57-year-old quadriplegic, who was admitted to Royal North Shore Hospital for a simple lung drain and biopsy, died after a series of alleged blunders that left him in agony and struggling to breathe. Ten months on, his widow Therese is demanding an inquest into his harrowing death. Mrs Mackay will recount her husband's ordeal to the special commission into the NSW public health system at Port Macquarie on Friday.

She says she wants to get justice for him and to prevent his fate befalling anyone else.

Her husband, who became a quadriplegic after a work accident 25 years ago, was an active North Coast public health campaigner.

"My husband had an exceptional life; that's why he deserves this," Mrs Mackay said.

The day after Mr Mackay was admitted to Royal North Shore, he underwent a "dangerous and unnecessary" surgery called pleurodosis.

According to Mrs Mackay, he did not have proper tests and scans beforehand. A transcription error caused his right lung to be suctioned at ten times the vacuuming power it should have been for almost 24 hours without staff noticing, she said.

Mrs Mackay alleges that staff were "grossly negligent".

She told of seeing a nurse drop a piece of equipment on the floor before picking it up and putting it back in her husband's mouth. Days later, he had developed golden staph and pneumonia.

Mrs Mackay believes her husband was kept alive unnecessarily for a "horror-filled" five weeks in intensive care. She told of being haunted by "dreadful images" of him bloated with infection, sepsis and fluid and in respiratory arrest with his lungs drowning in bloody mucus.

The Health Care Complaints Commission is investigating his case and Mrs Mackay expects to find out whether the NSW Coroner's office will open an inquest on May 2.

A spokesperson from Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service said: "Royal North Shore Hospital's Dr Philip Hoyle has expressed the hospital's regret at Mrs Mackay's distress over her husband's treatment".

Caption: Demanding answers: Therese Mackay says hospital mistakes cost her husband his life

Illus: Photo

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