

Widow says husband's death a 'horror movie'

By SIMONE PLEWS

A PORT Macquarie widow has told a parliamentary inquiry of the "appalling cruelty" her quadriplegic husband suffered at Royal North Shore Hospital.

Therese Mackay said the five-and-a-half weeks her husband Don spent at the Sydney hospital before his death on May 17 were like a "horror movie" playing in her mind.

"I am sick of hearing

about the poor bloody nurses and doctors," she told the inquiry last week.

"I think the poor patients and their loved ones need to be considered first as a priority and those good nurses, and good doctors be supported when they want to whistle blow, but I can't see that culture changing."

Mr Mackay attended Royal North Shore Hospital in April for a routine lung drain and

a biopsy to try to determine what was causing fluid build-up.

Mrs Mackay said one of the hospital's doctors then decided to perform an operation called a pleurodesis, which was meant to help prevent the build-up of fluid in the lung cavity.

"There was little chance that Don was going to survive that operation," she told the inquiry. "You should never do a pleurodesis at the same time you do

a biopsy ... should never do it on someone who can't fully expand their lungs."

Mrs Mackay said the "unnecessary and dangerous surgery" was performed on him while she was driving to Sydney from Port.

She claims her husband suffered "criminal neglect" at the hospital in the three days after his operation.

"They all missed the very visible signs of Don's impending respiratory arrest from the failed pleurodesis," she told the inquiry.

"He was struggling to breathe and began to hallucinate because, as I now know, there was a build-up of carbon dioxide in his system."

Mrs Mackay said her husband spent five weeks in the hospital's intensive care unit where they tried to get him to breathe again.

She criticised the alleged lack of hygiene and infection control at the hospital.

"He suffered," she said. "I have never seen suffering like that."

On May 14, Mrs Mackay said the doctors told them her hus-



Therese Mackay

band was dying and they were granted their wish to take him home.

She said they were told he would be flown home by air ambulance on a ventilator and a home ventilator organised to allow him to go home and die there.

"Just before we left we were told they could not find one home ventilator in the whole of Port Macquarie.

"So within minutes of Don arriving home the ambulance began asking for the (replacement) ventilator. His doctor allowed a small time and disconnected it (the ventilator he travelled to Port with). Don died a couple of hours later."