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Hospital hell killed our Vanessa

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By Kim Arlington
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WARREN and Michelle Anderson always knew their daughter Vanessa should not have died.

Yesterday, as a coroner came to the same conclusion about the 16-year-old's "tragic and avoidable" death at Royal North Shore Hospital, the findings were welcomed with tears and a standing ovation in the courtroom.

In a scorching criticism of the health system, Deputy State Coroner Carl Milovanovich said: "If one had sat down and planned the worst possible case scenario for Vanessa . . . it could not have been done better."

The Andersons were overcome with emotion, tearfully embracing each other and supporters as Mr Milovanovich called for a full and open inquiry into a health system clearly "labouring under pressure".

More than two years after losing "the most precious, precious thing in our lives", the inquest gave Vanessa's parents the answers they wanted - and the hope that other families would be spared the same kind of grief.

Mr Anderson yesterday wished Vanessa - the youngest of his three children - was still there beside him.

But he said the next best thing would be for the Government "to make sure no one else goes through what we're going through".

"From this moment on, Vanessa Anderson's ordeal, and the fact of what we've been through, will have meaning," he said.

The Andersons wept in Westmead Coroner's Court as Mr Milovanovich said he had seen an "unfortunate repetition of the same systemic problems" while investigating other hospital deaths.

"The same issues are invariably identified: not enough doctors, not enough nurses, inexperienced staff, poor communication, poor record-keeping and poor management," he said.