

**IN THE CROWN COURT
AT SHEFFIELD**

REX

V

SUSAN HARDWICK

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. On 24th July 2024 you travelled by taxi from your home to the Doncaster Royal Infirmary to visit your mother, Joan Hardwick, who was an inpatient on Kingfisher geriatric ward. At that time she was 89 years of age. She had been admitted to that hospital on 30th June having been at Mexborough Montagu Hospital for the previous 4 weeks recovering from a stroke but was transferred to the Doncaster Royal Infirmary because of low oxygen levels and breathing difficulties and was treated for pneumonia.

2. By 24th July your mother was sufficiently well to be transferred to a nursing home and the ward sister was planning to start the discharge process that morning. You did not want your mother to be transferred, believing her to be at risk due to previous issues with her care and you held the belief that she was going to Mexborough Montagu Hospital where she had been treated negligently. You went to the hospital by taxi, intent upon killing your mother and taking a smooth bladed knife that looked like a steak knife with you, leaving your home at 9:46. The taxi driver, who had driven you on four previous occasions, noticed that you were behaving out of character, muttering to yourself and fidgeting. When you arrived at the hospital, unusually for you, you seemed agitated and walked with purpose, appearing to be in a rush.

3. You went straight to your mother's private single room in Kingfisher Ward, where she was on her own. Shortly after you arrived a health care assistant came into the room in response to the buzzer being pressed. You were present when your mother, who was sitting up in bed, was told by the carer that she was going to a care home in Mexborough and not the hospital; your mother seemed fine with this but you shouted something at the carer. A short time later nursing staff heard noises which sounded like calls for help. The health care assistant went to the room and saw you covering your mother's face with two pillows. Your mother was waving her arms around apparently trying to get the pillows off her; you were aggressive, pressing the pillows down with both hands, with force, onto her face. Staff started to pull you off; your mother was saying "my daughter's trying to kill me", and you said you wanted to kill her. Whilst staff were trying to restrain you, you had one free hand and continued to try and suffocate your mother with a pillow. Other staff came to assist and it took a few of them to restrain you and get you out of the room; you tried to attack a member of the staff.
4. Your mother was seen to have a cut to her neck which was bleeding and to her left wrist and the left side of her chin. Your mother told staff that you had tried to kill her and began to apologise for what she had put the staff through; she said you had never behaved that way before but you had not wanted her to be transferred to Mexborough and that you were going to kill her and then yourself.
5. You told staff that you knew what you were doing, had planned it and brought the knife from home; you said you wanted your mother dead as she had no quality of life. You told the ward sister that you planned it and wanted to kill her; staff at Mexborough had placed a feeding tube into her lung rather than her stomach.
6. You told the police when they arrived that you attempted to kill your mother, but would not answer any questions about it.

7. The wound to your mother's neck was superficial and treated with steri-strips. She was discharged from the hospital on 15th August 2024 to a care home where she remains to this day. She retains full capacity, takes no medication and very rarely complains of pain or suffering. She claims not to recall the incident and is obviously very protective of you and distressed by your circumstances and being separated from you.
8. You were 65 years of age when you committed the offence. You have no previous convictions. You have cerebral palsy, which impacts primarily on the fluency of your speech and mobility, and are highly likely to have an underlying learning disability. You require daily support in respect of your personal care needs, and have significant mobility and communication difficulties. You say you have been assessed as suffering from autism. You are receiving treatment for cancer. You have a very rigid thought process; you hold black and white opinions on matters, and appear to struggle in understanding right and wrong and this thought process could have affected your judgment. When you were examined to determine your fitness to plead, you were severely depressed. You always lived with your mother and with your father until his death. You and your mother were co-dependent upon each other.
9. You have been examined by three consultant psychiatrists, whose reports I have read with care. They were engaged primarily to address your fitness to plead. On 23rd June each of them was satisfied that you were fit to plead and you entered a plea of guilty to attempting to murder your mother. I accept this plea was entered at the first opportunity and you are entitled to and will receive full credit for your guilty plea. No disposal under the provisions of the Mental Health Act is suggested or is appropriate and the Pre-Sentence Report specifically confirms that the proposal of a potential disposal involving a Mental Health Treatment Requirement is not an available option.
10. Those psychiatric reports, together with the Pre-Sentence Report prepared for this hearing confirm that your worries about your mother's

health and increasing unhappiness and frustration with the standard of your mother's hospital care lay at the heart of your actions. There have been difficulties in relation to contact with your mother when you wanted to communicate with her. I attach no significance to that. However, it is to be observed that great care will need to be taken in relation to contact with your mother in the future. She has never wanted you to be prosecuted and is distressed by these proceedings and its impact on the relationship between you.

11. I have to pass a sentence commensurate with the seriousness of your offence. I apply the relevant Definitive Guidelines when considering the appropriate sentence. Sentences for attempted murder are particularly fact specific. It is common ground that the level of harm fell within category 3 of the guideline, that is the lowest category. I have to determine your culpability by weighing up the factors identified in the guideline. There are two high culpability factors, namely taking a knife to the scene intending to use it to commit the offence and premeditation. The use of pillows to suffocate are a medium culpability factor. On your behalf, significance reliance is placed on a lesser culpability factor, namely, a genuine belief that the offence was an act of mercy. There is no evidence of your mother requesting or implying she wanted to die and, on the day of the offence, she was expecting to go to a care home and not to the hospital with which you had an issue. However, given your underlying mental disability and rigid thought process and the absence of any other possible reason for such a dramatic action I accept that you might have thought that it was the merciful thing to do at that time. The prosecution do not contend to the contrary. You and your mother had led co-dependent lives for many years. That is a factor that far removes this case from the more conventional case of a planned attempt to kill.
12. In my judgment, the most appropriate category for in your case is one of lesser culpability, for which the starting point for sentence is 5 years custody and the range is 3-6 years. Your planning and the use of

weapons requires a considerable upward adjustment from the guideline starting point within this category and I regard your committing the offence in a busy hospital ward as an aggravating factor. I have taken your mental disorder into account in categorising your offence. Your age and not having any previous convictions and the life difficulties you have, including the conditions to which I have referred, and being dependent in part on others, are mitigating factors. I also take account of the fact that your personal circumstances will cause additional difficulties in custody.

13. Balancing those factors in this exceptional case lead me to the conclusion that the appropriate custodial term before credit for your guilty plea is one of 4 years 6 months' custody. I reduce that term by way of credit for your guilty plea to one of 3 years.
14. I order payment of the statutory surcharge in the appropriate amount.
15. Susan Hardwick the sentence of the court for the attempted murder of your mother is a sentence of imprisonment for 3 years. You will serve no more than one-half of that term and then be released on licence until the end of your sentence and be liable to be recalled into custody should you breach its terms. The days you have already spent in custody in relation to the offence will count towards the sentence.