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Saks deaths spotlight mental health

by [Brian Anderson](#)

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Paula Knoll says that if anybody knew what her brother, 52-year-old Darren Wilson was capable of, he did.

In the months leading up to the death of Wilson and his wife, Doris Wilson, in their Saks home on Asbury Avenue on Sunday, Wilson had apparently told several people he was going to hurt somebody if he didn't get help, and fast.

"He went to Regional Medical Center three times and told them he was sick," Knoll said about her brother's condition. "He said he heard voices and that he felt like he was going to kill someone."

Anniston police have been able to say little about what took place at Wilson's home on Sunday, but said Doris Wilson, 50, was stabbed to death, while her husband's cause of death so far is unknown. A neighbor at the scene Sunday said he called 911 after a man he believed to be the boyfriend of Darren Wilson's daughter told him someone had been stabbed inside the house.

Knoll said when she learned there was a police standoff outside the home, she knew her brother wasn't going to come out alive.

And sadly, Knoll said, those closest to Wilson probably saw it coming.

Knoll said her family has an alarming history of mental illness and described her father as a schizophrenic who spent most of his life in and out of mental health facilities. She said she had one brother who committed suicide and another serving an 18-year jail sentence for assault, and it looked like those problems might finally have been catching up with Darren Wilson over the last year.

"He was paranoid," Knoll said, explaining that her brother believed the FBI was after him, and that his neighbors were spying on him. "He would hear voices and say there were men in black suits watching him, that sort of thing. He said he needed help."

He sought help, Knoll said, explaining that Wilson went to Regional Medical Center on more than one occasion to say he thought he might hurt himself or someone else. Knoll said he was referred to the county's mental health board and was told that without insurance and with a shortage of beds, there wasn't anything they could do for him.

Mickey Turner, executive director of the Calhoun-Cleburne Mental Health Board, said Thursday that even though he wasn't familiar with Wilson's case he would be unable to comment on it because of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, a federal law that, in part, protects information about health care.

Walking into a local hospital and asking for help isn't the best option for someone who might be mentally ill, said Jim Reddoch, the commissioner for the Alabama Department of Mental Health. While emergency rooms can deal with immediately dangerous situations, those seeking evaluation or long-term treatment are better served by mental health officers and facilities who can work with the uninsured on getting help.

"There are options out there," Reddoch said. "Going to the hospital just isn't the way to do it."

Jon Garlick, mental health officer for the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office, said 67 percent of people suffering from mental illness don't seek treatment due to lack of family support or embarrassment. Often situations only come to light when problems have gotten too far out of hand to be ignored. That's why it is important family members alert officials as quickly as possible, so a potentially mentally ill person is in the system and evaluated properly, he said.

Garlick said he couldn't comment on the situation Sunday or on whether other officials handled Wilson's case properly, but to the best of his knowledge, the Saks man wasn't on his radar.

"I wish I had known more about these people," Garlick said. "I would like to know what we could have done for them, but it never came across my desk."

But for Knoll, the issue is simple. If somebody needs help, and is asking for it, then there shouldn't be any gray area in treating them, she said.

"There's a woman whose parents lost their child," Knoll said. "There's a daughter who lost her parents, and there's my mother who lost another son, and she lost him knowing he was the murderer of an innocent woman. This tragedy could have been prevented if someone would have just listened to him at the hospital."

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