

26 September 2022

Ms Emma McCahon
Health Service Chief Executive
PO Box 871
Rockhampton Qld 4700

Email: CQHSCE@health.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms McCahon,

Recently, I attended a meeting with Nurses Professional Association Queensland members at Gladstone.

Our members raised a number of concerns in relation to working conditions and patient safety. In a spirit of co-operation, I thought that rather than immediately raising a breach notice for breaches of the current Enterprise Agreement, I would pass on these concerns for your consideration and for your prompt attention.

We would be happy to consult and to work with you to co-operatively resolve the following matters.

Gladstone Emergency Department:

- ED Management doesn't have a regular presence in the department.
- No regular Emergency Department team meetings.

Patient Flow Risks:

- Acute ward beds are closed due to the hospitals inability to resource adequate staff levels, that is, both nurses and Medical Officers to meet minimum service requirements. This has a knock-on effect of patients for waiting for admission creating bottlenecks in the Emergency Department.
- The applicable minimum Nurse- Patient ratios are not being adhered to regularly in Gladstone Hospital.
- No Doctor has been allocated to the Emergency Department Waiting Room to assess:
 - (1) Category 4 and 5 patients which blows our waiting times.
 - (2) Walk-ins who can be triaged as Category 2 & 3 resultant in:
 - (a) Poor healthcare outcomes for the patient
 - (b) Exposure of team and organisation to potential litigation
 - (c) Staff exposure to verbal and/or physical aggression from patients who are waiting extended times.

(3) Fast Track is only open only on an afternoon shift due to funding and staff resources not being available to run for extended hours.

Mental Health Risks:

- In the case of mental health presentations, there are no qualified clinicians to assess and to admit patient as there are no mental health beds available in Gladstone. Consequently, mental health patients wait in Gladstone Emergency Department for up to 4 days for a bed to become available in Rockhampton.
- The cubicle where mental health patients are held is not conducive to their physical and psychological wellbeing; delaying early treatment interventions and blowing out length of stay.

Gladstone Maternity Risks:

- As you know, the Mackay Hospital is currently under investigation, yet in Gladstone we currently have no maternity service for this catchment – a growth area. Expectant mothers have to travel to Rockhampton (approx. 90 minutes) to deliver their baby putting both mother and baby at high risk. In some instances, the mother may be in active labour and is being transported by private vehicle.
- The QAS Service is not adequately resourced to transfer patients to Rockhampton placing the Gladstone community at greater risk should emergency services be required in the district.
- Expectant Mothers are transferred without appropriate risk assessments and management plans.
- Gladstone mothers in labour regularly present to Emergency Department for delivery, yet there are no midwives available to manage these emergent deliveries.
- We understand that the HHS Board were unable to negotiate suitable admitting rights for the local Private Obstetrician who no longer works in the public sector.
- We are informed that HHS management decisions around the status of the maternity unit were based on a third world model of care which was not aligned with regional data and does not meet Australian standards of care.

Orthopaedic Service Risks:

- Minimal services are now offered at Gladstone with more complex cases now having to be transferred approx. 90 minutes away to Rockhampton. This again places patients at risk due to delays and discomfort.

Staffing Risks:

- **Fatigue Management** - Staff are being rostered on an early after night duty, returning to work fatigued. The result is some staff have reduced their hours or gone casual to cope with fatigue and to protect their registration. Staff are also routinely not having their meal breaks as there is no staff member allocated to relieve them for their meal break. Under the EBA, staff who do not have their

meal break within the 4th to 6th hour of their shift are on overtime until they are able to take their break – this is not always happening and staff are being underpaid where this happens. This must be fixed and backpay must be provided asap.

- **Night Duty** – There are insufficient staff rostered for night duty for staff to take their entitled breaks.
- **Sleep room** - Further, there is no Pod/ Sleep room available for night staff to take their break as set down in the EBA.
- **Human Resource Management Issues** – In some instances, the pay run deadline is not being met by Managers. Accordingly, staff are not being paid for the fortnight and have to wait a month to be paid putting them into a higher tax bracket. Rockhampton processes these payroll runs and the managers are completing the staff's AVACs. This must be fixed and any liability for increased taxation must be resolved by the HHS asap.
- **Recruitment and Selection**- Gladstone staff are having difficulty in obtaining feedback post interview, this must be addressed. Staff have also expressed concern as to the relevance of some of the interview questions to select the best candidate for nursing roles. Staff also question how Expressions of Interest are managed and we seek your written assurance that Queensland Health policy and guidelines being adhered to.
- **Staff morale** -is being impacted by complaints of nepotism in recruitment and selection, we seek your assurance that this is not happening as this practice is impacting on staff morale and on patient care and outcomes due to inappropriate staff selection or promotion.

In summary, Gladstone nurses are concerned and they are looking to you and the HHS Board to address the Gladstone community's needs. They want to do a good job for a growing community which deserves appropriate and timely healthcare, satisfied staff, where patients can feel and be safe.

We hope we can work with you and your team in a spirit of co-operation to promptly resolve these concerns. I am available to discuss these matters with you.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Gilbert

President

Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland

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C.c. Mr Paul Bell AM, Chair, Central Queensland Hospital and Health Board.