Patients put at risk over cost-saving measures at Blacktown

The NSW Nurses and Midwives’ Association (NSWNMA) has reiterated calls for the NSW Government to introduce mandated nurse-to-patient ratios of one nurse to three patients (1:3) into emergency departments and stop putting patients’ lives at risk.

It follows major concerns highlighted at Blacktown Hospital yesterday where patient safety was repeatedly compromised and emergency department nursing staff were forced to manage the care of patients with limited resources and support.

Acting General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Judith Kiejda, said it was unacceptable for the NSW Government to encourage an increased number of nursing staff on leave over the summer and close public hospital beds, expecting the people of NSW to deal with it.

“This government has a track record of forcing the hand of Local Health Districts – prompting a high number of nursing staff on leave and bed closures to minimise budget pressures over the summer,” Ms Kiejda said.

“We’ve been advised that there was no ‘unusual spike’ in presentations to Blacktown Hospital’s emergency department yesterday when compared to previous years, contrary to the NSW Health Minister’s claims today.

“The Health Minister is abdicating her responsibility of delivering safe patient care and a well resourced public health system.

“Jillian Skinner promised the people of this State that patient safety would come first – clearly that’s not a commitment she’s kept.

“As a result of bed closures at Blacktown Hospital, one nurse was looking after 24 patients in the waiting room of the emergency department yesterday as well as patients waiting on ambulance stretchers, while one resuscitation nurse cared for four acutely unwell patients – two in beds in a corridor.

“A major concern of our members was the fact that patients who were admitted to the emergency department for care were forced to sit in chairs in the waiting room as a result of the bed closures.

“The Health Minister must make improved ratios in emergency departments a priority so that our members can deliver the safest possible care to their patients,” Ms Kiejda said.

Only selected wards in metropolitan public hospitals currently have ratios in place, however, this does not include 1:3 in emergency departments. International research clearly indicates that increasing the amount of nursing care leads to better health outcomes for patients.

The NSWNMA has vowed to continue campaigning for extended ratios and ensure the community is aware of the issues so they can get behind their nurses and voice concerns.
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