



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION **MEDIA RELEASE**

General Secretary: Brett Holmes | Assistant General Secretary: Judith Kiejda
P (02) 8595 1234 | www.facebook.com/nswnma | twitter.com/nswnma

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More nursing staff desperately needed at Belmont Hospital

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) is urging management at Belmont Hospital to employ more nursing staff to alleviate workload issues and reduce the excessive overtime being forced upon current staff.

Fed up by a lack of urgency from management to address the concerns raised, the NSWNMA filed a dispute last month in the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW against Hunter New England Local Health District, for grossly breaching staffing arrangements at Belmont Hospital.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said management's complete disregard for minimum, safe staffing arrangements under the *Public Health System Nurses and Midwives (state) Award* was outrageous and the Belmont Hospital branch members were suffering as a result.

"Our members had been raising their concerns about staffing and workloads issues for some time and management failed to implement any immediate, short-term or even long-term solutions to address the situation," Mr Holmes said.

"When Hunter New England LHD declined to volunteer the staffing information we requested, our subsequent investigations of the hospital's own records revealed they were in breach of the award.

"Across four wards and units at Belmont Hospital the absolute minimum number of safe staffing hours is 5.0 nursing hours per patient per day, but from January to August our audit showed there were only two weeks of compliance with the Award.

"Members also indicated to us that Nurse Unit Managers had often been pressured not to allow their rostering budget to exceed the 5.0 nursing hours – a clear breach of the award.

"Fortunately when we raised these concerns in the Industrial Relation Commission of NSW, the Commissioner agreed management had been doing the wrong thing and urgent action was required.

"The Commissioner has made recommendations for Hunter New England LHD to comply with the Award, inform Nurse Unit Managers of the minimum requirement of nursing hours in the relevant units and wards, and for spot checks of the data to continue until December."

Mr Holmes said both the NSWNMA and Hunter New England LHD representatives were working through the IRC's 17 recommendations and were hopeful of an amicable outcome at Belmont Hospital.

"The bottom line is Hunter New England LHD needs to employ more nursing staff at Belmont Hospital to meet the demands of the local community," added Mr Holmes.

"It's not good enough for management to say they cannot find staff – we've checked and there is not a shortage of nurses looking for work in the Lower Hunter region.

"Hospital management needs to be more innovative in their recruitment to employ more nursing staff, which in turn would alleviate the amount of unreasonable overtime they're currently expecting staff to do to fill the gaps."



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Both parties are due back before the Industrial Relations Commission next month.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 550 324

Gia Hayne, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317