



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coffs Harbour mental health nurses consider action over workloads

Nursing staff at Coffs Harbour Community Mental Health have had a less than enjoyable Easter this year thanks to longstanding workload issues at the site.

The affected nurses are set to implement a range of measures to manage their own workloads, after failed attempts to seek adequate resources from Mid North Coast Local Health District (LHD) management.

Despite raising concerns with management eight months ago, members of Coffs Harbour Mental Health Branch of the New South Wales Nurses' and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) are frustrated little has been done to address them.

Last September, branch members identified the number of full time equivalent (FTE) nurses in the Extended Care Service team were insufficient to cope with the rising number of clients. Subsequently, members called on management to consider increasing FTE numbers to assist with the demand and to introduce a cap on caseloads.

Members also raised concerns that the LHD had failed to meet State Award conditions to cover relief for nurses on annual leave. Ignoring calls by staff for a new casual relief pool to alleviate this particular issue, management announced that annual leave would instead only be approved for one nurse at a time.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said the situation represented a complete disregard for reasonable workloads expected of staff.

"We have long been calling for ratios to be implemented into community mental health services," Mr Holmes said.

"This appears to be a classic case of management pushing nursing staff to the limit by overloading case managers in an attempt to save their budget bottom line.

"It is unacceptable to put this sort of pressure on highly skilled nursing staff trying to do their job and support vulnerable members of the local Coffs Harbour community to stay out of acute mental health inpatient units, where costs to the Health system are much higher than proper community care delivery."

To date, management has failed to resolve any of the issues that have been raised by staff, opting to spend additional time reviewing the current situation.

The Coffs Harbour Mental Health Branch of the NSWNMA is due to meet with representatives of the LHD today, Wednesday 23 April 2014, to further discuss the concerns raised. If a resolution is not reached following the meeting, branch members have voted to implement a range of actions on site starting Monday 28 April 2014.



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