



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Workloads issue forces bed closures at Shoalhaven

A number of beds will begin shutting down from Monday afternoon at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital on the state's south coast, following action by members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) over ongoing nursing staff shortages in Medical ward A.

At a meeting last Thursday, members of the Shoalhaven District Hospital branch unanimously passed a resolution to begin closing beds, to ensure nursing staff levels match the number of patients that allows nurses to meet their professional obligations for safe patient care.

Since notification of the member's intention to act, the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Local Health District (LHD) – after 14 weeks of being aware of the shortages – has scrambled over the weekend to fill vacant shifts.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said he welcomed the attempt by management to fill the outstanding shifts during the weekend however, no long-term solution was identified by management.

“Our members face the prospect of their patients being continually short-changed on the guaranteed nursing hours they are entitled to,” Mr Holmes said.

“This puts patients and nurses at risk and our members cannot continue to ignore these risks.

“Branch members confirmed Medical ward A had been operating short-staffed for several months and LHD management had not been adhering to nurse-to-patient ratio legal requirements stipulated in the state Award.

“It's simply not acceptable for LHD management to put nursing staff in this position and ignore their calls for workloads to be covered adequately.”

Medical ward A regularly has 37 patients, including four monitored cardiac patients, however the ward is currently only funded and staffed for 33 patients.

Staffing spot checks over the past 14 weeks revealed, on average, Medical ward A in Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital had fallen under the required 5.5 Nursing-Hours-Per-Patient-Day by 70 hours per week.

In accordance with the Public Health System (state) Award clause 53 (s) 5: *'action must immediately commence to rectify the shortfall...'*

Mr Holmes said, as per normal practice, emergency cases presenting at the ward would be prioritised and members would always deliver high-level, life saving patient care.



“Our members will continue to monitor the situation and reduce bed numbers to the actual staffed levels, until such time as adequate measures to deal with the staffing issues are implemented,” Mr Holmes said.

Nursing staff will commence the bed closures, as practicable, on a shift by shift basis where there is a shortfall of nursing hours to meet the legally required nursing hours per patient.

Members of the Shoalhaven District Hospital branch are expected to meet with LHD management on Tuesday, 20 August 2014.

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