



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

General Secretary: Brett Holmes | Assistant General Secretary: Judith Kiejda

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HNE Board turns its back on Tamworth nurses and midwives

Nurses and midwives forced to juggle increased workloads, regular overtime and chronic understaffing at Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital have been dealt another major blow.

The Hunter New England Local Health District (HNE LHD) Board, made up of 12 senior clinicians and business representatives from across the region, has refused to intervene in the ongoing staffing issues in Tamworth hospital's emergency department and maternity unit.

Tamworth Hospital Branch of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) wrote to the HNE Board in a desperate plea for assistance, but instead were advised:

'The Board is confident that the Local Health District is working with the Association to manage this dispute appropriately.'

Hunter New England Health chose not to adopt the IRC recommendation to roster additional staff to the Emergency Department in the knowledge that this work is ongoing, and there are plans underway that are expected to ease pressure on the Emergency Department's main treatment area...

I understand the hospital activity has been high recently, but this is expected to ease as the busy winter period comes to an end...

In regards to Maternity Unit staffing, I am advised that to comply with BirthRate Plus, Tamworth Hospital has counted only the midwifery staff that are 'productive' meaning they are actively available to work in the maternity unit. As part of this work, Tamworth Hospital has acknowledged a number of staff who are on long service leave, sick leave and maternity leave. While they are not currently working, they continue to hold positions with the unit which are backfilled to maintain the required staffing levels. Although they are not working, these staff members must remain on the unit's roster to ensure they continue to receive their entitlements and pay during their leave.'

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, who met with Branch members in Tamworth today, was scathing of the HNE Board for declining to intervene in the matter and failing to speak directly with nursing or midwifery staff during their Board meeting at the hospital today.

"We've got nurses and midwives working beyond exhaustion here at Tamworth hospital, doing regular overtime – particularly on the night shift – and going home in tears," Mr Holmes said.

"It's bad enough that local management has treated these hardworking nurses and midwives in this manner for so long. Local management has failed in their duty of care to the staff and to the broader Tamworth community.

"We have repeatedly raised the concerns of nursing and midwifery staff to local management. They have repeatedly ignored these concerns and chose not to take on the recommendations of the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW.



“I can tell you that if we took industrial action, HNE LHD would be straight to the Industrial Relations Commission saying ‘tell them to stop!’ and they would be demanding orders against us.

“It’s extremely disappointing that the HNE Board will not intervene in these unsafe staffing matters, given a core priority of the Board is to ‘improve local patient outcomes and respond to issues that arise’.

“Local nurses and midwives have dedicated their lives to ensuring the delivery of safe patient care for this community. They deserve the professional courtesy of a safe working environment and adequate staffing levels in accordance with the Public Health System (State) Award.

“This LHD, the Board, Chief Executive Officer and senior members of local management need to listen to the very real and scary concerns that local nurses and midwives have.”

Mr Holmes said the NSWNMA would continue to vigorously pursue safe staffing in the emergency department and maternity unit at Tamworth hospital.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 550 324

Judith Kiejda, Assistant General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 674 119

Gia Hayne, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317