



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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

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Unregulated staff proposed for mental health ICU

In an unprecedented move for Australia's health sector, Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital's Mental Health Intensive Care Unit (MHICU) has advised of its intention to introduce unregulated Assistants in Nursing (AiNs) into its unstable and unpredictable clinical environment.

The Hornsby Branch of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) will hold a stop work meeting TODAY at James Park, opposite the hospital, to voice their concerns.

NSWNMA Acting General Secretary, Judith Kiejda said although AiNs play an important role in the greater health system, their introduction into this specialised and highly acute unit would create a dangerous working environment.

"Mental health intensive care units provide acute care for patients who are very unwell and often highly agitated, volatile and unpredictable. While AiNs play an important role caring for patients in low-care settings, it would be negligent to place a minimally qualified worker in this environment," Ms Kiejda said.

"The difference in experience between a registered nurse (RN) and Assistant in Nursing is vast. An AiN can receive their qualification after a six week course, while an RN has completed an undergraduate degree and often gone on to do further study, such as a graduate diploma or Master of Mental Health Nursing at university to specialise in mental health. RNs are also bound by a code of conduct and duty of care, while AiNs are not.

"This is clearly a cost-saving measure. There is no other reason to introduce an AiN into such a critical and specialised area where a high level of communication, observation and response is vital. Workers need to have sufficient grounding or at least an understanding of the complexities of mental illness and an AiN does not have that kind of experience.

"The unpredictable nature of patients in the MHICU requires constant clinical assessment and technical, professional skills. We've expressed our concerns with management but at this stage have not reached an agreement, so the branch will be taking action today."

The NSWNMA Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital branch will hold a stop work meeting today at **11:00am** in **James Park** opposite the hospital on **Lowe Street**.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Judith Kiejda, Acting General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 674 119

Darius Altman, Lead Organiser, NSWNMA 0414 550 058

Danielle Mahoney, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317