



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Nurses and management at Wagga Hospital reach agreement

Management at Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) has closed eight of the 16 surge beds at Wagga Wagga Rural Referral Hospital over the weekend as a result of ongoing concerns about unsafe staffing from excessive overtime.

In an agreement between MLHD and members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) Wagga Wagga Rural Referral Hospital branch a roster for the eight beds remaining open has been provided for the beds staying open in the Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) unit. The additional eight beds in the surgical unit will not be utilised for surge capacity until such a time that an ongoing roster can be provided to safely staff those beds.

In addition, nurses will not be permitted to work more than 16 hours of overtime in a two week period.

Unprecedented presentations to the emergency department are causing significant bed block and staff are urging the community to utilise their GP services, rather than presenting to the emergency department with common ailments.

The occupied surge beds in the surgical unit will be vacated over the coming days as patients are either discharged or transferred out and subsequently closed down.

Members from the NSWNMA Wagga Wagga Rural Referral Hospital branch voted in support of the motion at a branch meeting late yesterday.

Judith Kiejda, Assistant General Secretary of the NSWNMA said it was a relief to see management come to an agreement with nurses after months of negotiations.

"We're glad to see management finally take nurses seriously by closing beds they can't staff and creating a roster to properly staff the other eight surge beds at the hospital," Ms Kiejda said.

"It's also a relief to see a cap on the amount of overtime nurses can do each fortnight. We will reassess the situation in two weeks with MLHD to see whether these extra measures have taken some of the pressure off nurses.

"We also need the community's help in reducing unnecessary strain on the ED while staff are still being recruited. Winter is the busiest time of the year for hospitals, so we'd urge those who have a common cold or flu to see their GP first.

"The NSWNMA will work closely with our members and management over the coming weeks to make sure the agreement is adhered to. We will also monitor its effectiveness to determine whether other measures are needed during the MLHD's recruitment drive."

Low staffing numbers have been an issue at the hospital since it opened over seven months ago, causing fatigue, stress and increased sick leave. Nurses say it is having an impact on the level of care they can provide patients.



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