



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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Patient safety buckles inside Westmead's busy ED

With Christmas and New Year festivities on the doorstep, members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) Westmead Hospital branch have raised grave fears for safe patient care inside their hospital's overstretched emergency department.

For months, Westmead Hospital's emergency department has struggled under crippling admission rates, compounded by a compact layout, prompting increasingly unsafe conditions for the nursing and medical staff as they attempt to offer essential care to Western Sydney residents.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said it was unacceptable for nurses to be assessing and caring for patients in the corridors, waiting rooms or ambulance bays of a major metropolitan referral hospital, and supported the branch's call for immediate solutions to address the chronic under-resourcing.

"The myriad of issues plaguing Westmead Hospital's emergency department are not new, yet the Ministry of Health and Western Sydney Local Health District appear hesitant to introduce safer staffing levels and adequate resources, instead opting for a benchmarking exercise," Mr Holmes said.

"It won't matter what that benchmarking says because the reality is we have an overloaded, understaffed emergency department that needs fixing now.

"The Ministry knows Westmead's emergency department has the longest average length of stay (up to 7 hours) and the largest number of patients in their ED for more than 24 hours compared to similar hospitals.

"Our members are extremely concerned about their ability to provide the local community with safe patient care when the emergency department is constantly full of admitted patients.

"This has also prompted genuine security and safety concerns among the nursing staff. Long wait times and extended stays have led to increased complaints and aggression towards staff, including death threats and equipment being used as weapons against them.

"Overwhelmed by the challenging work environment and risks, several senior nursing staff have already resigned, forcing an increased reliance on less experienced nursing staff to fill shifts.

"This simply cannot continue. The branch has outlined reasonable strategies during consultation with the Local Health District however, management is only considering one temporary 12-hour nursing position to assist on night shift and deferring other recommendations to next year.

"Understandably, our members are extremely disappointed. It's disingenuous for the Local Health District to acknowledge the systemic issues and not consider immediate solutions to address the overwhelming patient safety concerns."

Members of the NSWNMA Westmead Hospital branch have met with their local state MP to discuss the widespread issues and seek urgent representations to the Minister for Health.

*****Members of the NSWNMA branch will be available for interview at 11AM TODAY on the lawns outside Westmead Hospital (cnr Hawkesbury and Darcy Roads), by request.***



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