

Nurses claim hospital denied them security

TESS IKONOMOU, Townsville Bulletin

June 18, 2018

NURSES at Townsville Hospital claim they have been refused permanent security guards after a string of vicious assaults.

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union will be requesting an “urgent review” of workplace health and safety at the Alec Illin Secure Mental Health Rehabilitation Unit.

Nurses in the unit told the *Bulletin* staff had repeatedly approached management at meetings with requests for a guard in their unit after a number of assaults.

After being approached by the *Bulletin*, the Townsville Hospital and Health Service revealed the board will this week consider a recommendation to trial increasing security in the unit temporarily.

A nurse in the unit who wished to remain anonymous over fears of job security, said one of the nurses had her back broken by a patient and was now working in an administrative role.

“She has not long returned to work, though she is doing office work and probably won’t nurse again,” the nurse said.

“Multiple staff have asked but the response is it costs too much.

“We’ve been told we have the training to defuse situations but it’s not fair, I shouldn’t have to go to work and be beaten up. It’s not right.

“I feel really bad for the male nurses. When there’s a violent incident they feel the pressure to step in.”

The source said one nurse had their ribs broken in an assault last October.

Another nurse who also wants to remain unnamed said workers in the mental health unit would feel much safer with a security guard.

“Sometimes being attacked comes with working in the mental health unit, but of course I want a security guard, we all do,” the source said.

Townsville Hospital Health Service acting chief executive Kieran Keyes said the request had been raised by staff in monthly meetings and was being considered.

He denied that requests had been rejected because of budget constraints.

“The safety of our staff and consumers is always our first priority,” he said.

“The board executive committee will receive a paper early this week recommending a trial to temporarily increase security resourcing in the mental health unit.

“This supports an immediate response to safety concerns that have been raised.

“As part of this process we will consider a range of options to ensure the best solution is identified for the mental health unit.”

Mr Keyes said since April 30, there had been three occupational violence incidents in the secure mental health unit that led to three staff needing medical treatment.

Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union Townsville organiser Kaylene Turnbull said action was being requested.

“The QNMU recognises it can be difficult maintaining a therapeutic environment and ensuring staff safety. However, this should never be to the detriment of staff wellbeing,” she said.

“The Health Service is responsible for protecting staff safety through proper resourcing including security.”

There were 70 violent incidents recorded up to the end of April this year, with 202 recorded last year and 74 in 2016.