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Formal complaint - Townsville HHS

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26 October 2018 at 11:37

Attention: Paul Goldsbrough, Executive Director, Safety, Policy and Workers' Compensation Services

Dear Mr Goldsbrough

We write to place a formal complaint about the CEO of Townsville HHS Mr Keiran Keyes and The Townsville Hospital (TTH) itself and request that you conduct an immediate investigation.

Our association (NPAQ) represents a growing number of nurses throughout Queensland. A number of our members in TTH were recently involved in a serious workplace incident which had very real potential of serious risk of long term health problems and reduced life expectancy for nurses involved. A number of nurses and hospital staff were put at immediate risk by the failure of hospital management to properly secure a patient with a notifiable infectious disease. It was found that this person's partner was bringing in illicit and illegal drugs and was supporting the patient to self-administer. Uncapped hyperdemic syringes were found hidden on their person and around the bedspace. Used drug paraphernalia were found under the patient's pillow, in their tissue box, in an incontinence pad and under the sheets. The risk of needle stick injuries from exposed sharps was extremely high. Had such an injury occurred then the nurse or hospital worker would have been faced with long term, ongoing, debilitating health issues and a shortened life.

This was being reported and raised for over 14 days with nil action.

A number of documented requests were made to the CEO about the danger but no action was taken other than to point out that in one case security were too busy and in another case that because security officers under hospital policy had to work in tandem, that it would be too expensive. Ironically, both were probably correct but both were equally unacceptable to the nurses at risk. With the announcement yesterday that TTH has produced a \$12.8 million surplus, it immediately raises the question as to why such costs would be cut.

On 12 October NPAQ legal team manager Miles Heffernan issued a notice calling for an immediate resolution. It must be said that the nursing staff not withdrawing is a testament to their courage and dedication. No employee should be expected to risk their life in order to do their job.

Thanks to Mr Heffernan the immediate threat was removed by CEO Keyes who finally agreed to just ban the patient's partner from the hospital to prevent the drugs coming in the first place. Mr Heffernan also called for the HAZMAT team to immediately come in and remove all the dangerous paraphernalia and certify the area safe.

We do not know if THIS was actually done.

On 25 October I met with the recently appointed Branch Secretary of TTH and two of her senior clinician colleagues. They portrayed a disturbing situation. Ongoing similar occupation violence occurrences date back some two years, management has been contacted repeatedly and the safety and wellbeing of many nurses and hospital workers remains at risk due to ineffective Occupational Violence Protection.

We believe without clear procedures and policies which initiate immediate action the situation remains unsafe.

It is a requirement that all dangerous workplace incidents be fully investigated by the Department. Furthermore so that public confidence can be maintained it is crucial that the public who use the facility and all the employees and contractors who work there know.

- (a) that the investigation is being undertaken and what the scope of it is.
- (b) what the results of the investigation are and the recommendations from the investigation.

Furthermore the people need to know what is going to be done to prevent a similar situation occurring again.

Would you kindly advise us accordingly so that we may inform our members and the public at large.

Yours sincerely

Cath Seaver

NPAQ Secretary

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