

12 January 2022

Ms Christine Osborne
Hunter New England Local Health District

By email: Christine.Osborne@health.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Osborne

RE: Disputes in relation to the New Maitland Hospital

I write in relation to the several disputes between the HSU and HNELHD regarding the move to the New Maitland Hospital and associated workforce changes and restructures. Specifically, I write to raise many serious additional concerns that members have raised over the past week, in addition to the concerns previously brought to HNELHD's attention. These concerns must be resolved prior to any changes being implemented by HNELHD.

Gardeners

We understand that the proposal to remove gardener positions from the Lower Hunter Sector is currently being amended. We have received further feedback from members supporting the need for all gardener positions to be maintained due to the workload required across the Old and New Maitland Hospitals, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock. These positions must be maintained.

Administrative Employees

Outpatients

Administrative employees working in outpatient clinics have expressed many concerns with the proposed changes. We again request HNELHD appropriately resource administrative services with a significant increase in FTE to assist in addressing the follow issues (in addition to the issues already raised).

Regarding workloads:

- members are concerned that more experienced employees with more training will be expected to take on much of the burden of teaching less experienced staff as well as higher workloads without any further resources being provided, and
- members are concerned that the expectation to manage a greatly increased number of clinics and new processes will lead to significant increases in workloads and unreasonable expectations to ensure the service runs effectively despite under resourcing.

We remind HNELHD that employees can only be expected to undertake reasonable workloads and should not be requested to work at an unsustainably high pace nor should they be requested to work unreasonable amounts of overtime. If HNELHD has not properly resourced the services it proposes to provide at the New Maitland Hospital, employees should not be expected to fill that gap.

Regarding management or employee performance:

- management have indicated that staff may be reprimanded if they are unable to process administrative tasks as efficiently as other staff members – that is an unreasonable and draconian approach to the introduction of these significant changes.

Management must provide sufficient guidance, support and training to enable employees to work as effectively as possible having regard to their prior work experience and training. We remind HNELHD that unreasonable expectations may lead to psychological and other injuries, and failure to meet unreasonable work expectations would not justify discipline.

Regarding new systems, information, guidance and training:

- there has been little or no information provided to individuals in relation to the positions which they will fill or the work which they will be required to undertake on moving to the New Maitland Hospital,
- there has been little or no information and training provided to individuals in relation to the expectation to work across a range of new clinics, specialty areas and with new staff,
- with only a week until the proposed move, there has been no guidance or information provided regarding how to escalate issues within individual clinics, and
- no training has been provided in relation to new phone systems, Q-Flow, RIMS, or changes to/differences in medical billing in relation to the new clinics.

Members require the above information, guidance, and training as soon as possible.

Other information/logistical issues:

- employees will be required to work from one (down from two) computer screen, which will cause very significant losses to efficiency,
- all outpatient referrals are being referred to one number with no identification of the relevant service causing inefficiency,
- contact information for the New Maitland Hospital, including relevant addresses and phone numbers, have not been provided to administrative employees and is inhibiting their ability to appropriately manage and plan future clinics,
- new IT systems may either be non-operational or unable to be operated by staff because of a lack of training,
- there is currently no guidance on how checking-in / rebooking appointments will work in the New Maitland Hospital, and
- all referrals will be put through RIMS with insufficient staff trained in the system.

These issues will cause significant losses to efficiency and impact the services being provided at the New Maitland Hospital if not promptly resolved.

Finally, we understand that some administrative staff are not being actively included in meetings with management. That is inappropriate and should be remedied immediately. Further, we understand that the exclusion may relate to union membership. If employees are excluded from any workplace activity on the basis of their union membership, the HSU would immediately take that matter to the appropriate court or tribunal.

Security Officers and Wardspersons

Escorting to outpatients

Wardspersons are frequently being requested to escort patients from the entry of the Old Maitland Hospital into the hospital. Those requests often occur during their already high workloads. This is likely to continue and worsen in the New Maitland Hospital because of the additional outpatient clinics and larger footprint. This significant additional workload further illustrates the need to increase Wardspersons FTE in the New Maitland Hospital.

Security Risk Assessment and proposed staffing

We again refer to the Risk Assessment undertaken by HNELHD in relation to security staffing.

Members have highlighted that many hospitals in NSW Health, including John Hunter, Campbelltown and Singleton Hospitals have a higher security to patient ratio than proposed at the New Maitland Hospital (being approximately 1 to 100 at John Hunter and Campbelltown and 1 to 72 at Singleton, as compared to **1 to 175** at the New Maitland Hospital). This further demonstrates the unreasonableness of the proposed security resources at the New Maitland Hospital.

Further, we understand that the security incidents considered when deciding on the resourcing of security at the New Maitland Hospital was based on IMS reporting. It is common knowledge that IMS is an underutilised tool likely to pick up a small fraction of incidents. Further, we understand the process commonly used prior to moving staff from HealthShare to HNELHD was for security to document incidents informally. Having proposed staffing levels partially on the basis of IMS reported incidents and without regard to informally reported incidents, HNELHD must reconsider its proposal which under resources the New Maitland Hospital.

Other issues

In relation to the engagement of a manager of Security and Wardspersons, members request reassurance that HNELHD will ensure the appointee will have, or be required to obtain, all relevant security licences.

Finally, we have received further requests to ensure HNELHD maintain the particular work arrangements employees currently have in place which allow them to meet their out of work requirements (for example, caring for children). We understand that some of these arrangements have been in place for more than 30 years and there is no requirement for those arrangements to change to meet service needs in the New Maitland Hospital.

Way forward

We request HNELHD respond to and address each of the issues identified above as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Lappin', written over the typed name.

Jeremy Lappin
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Health Services Union
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