

7 January 2022

Mr Olasunbo Olalere
Hunter New England Imaging

By email: Olasunbo.OLalere@health.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Olalere

RE: Dispute – Hunter New England Imaging (HNEI) and the Health Services Union (HSU)

We write regarding the dispute in relation to HNEI's move to the NMH, the changes currently occurring within HNEI, and the changes proposed to occur in relation to the move.

The HSU has sought and received feedback from members on the proposals provided by HNEI. The significant issues raised by members must be addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and the proper delivery of services in the NMH.

Increased workload and understaffing

Members feel the department is understaffed for their current workload and that this issue will be significantly worsened by the changes proposed by HNEI. Members are stressed, have low morale and feel as though the service and staff are at breaking point. We understand these issues have previously been raised with HNEI to no avail and members are rightly disappointed with management's lack of responsiveness.

Members are concerned their workload will significantly because of:

- the increased footprint of the department,
- the increased distance between departments,
- the increased modalities,
- the operation of 2 scanners with 1 booking list and the likelihood of increased use of both scanners over time,
- taking on teaching of university students within 2 weeks of commencing in a new environment with new equipment and workflows,
- the new requirement to undertake duties previously undertaken by a nurse,
- the increased patient load associated with the new oncology department, and
- the need to move patients between modalities.

The proposed changes and allocated FTE grossly underestimate and do not address the significant increase in workload likely to occur with the move to the NMH.

Reallocation of 0.4FTE from theatres to MRI

We understand that the 0.4 FTE proposed to be reallocated to service the new MRI machine is not FTE “over and above what is required” for current services, as indicated by HNEI. We understand an unsuccessful trial of allocating all work in relation to theatres was conducted and has subsequently been put in place *prior* to any consultation with the HSU and despite negative feedback from staff. We also understand that there has been no reduction in work in theatres, rather, all work has simply been reallocated from two radiographers to a single radiographer.

As this change was implemented without proper consultation with the HSU, we will consider disputing the change through the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

Reallocation of nursing duties to radiographers

We understand that management have proposed to move the nurse previously allocated to CT to cover patient holding in the NMH, and radiographers will have to perform all the duties previously undertaken by the nurse, including cannulation. This increase in workload further demonstrates the need for additional FTE on moving to the NMH.

Breaks and sick leave relief

It is concerning to note that only on moving to the NMH will services close to allow for meal breaks. If staff are not receiving meal breaks in accordance with the Award, overtime should be paid on every occasion. We also note there is no plan to ensure meal breaks occur outside of the US and CT departments. Further, we note that scans and theatre cases rarely run perfectly to plan, and the regimented approach to meal break relief is unlikely to be practical.

Further, we understand that staff regularly do not receive morning tea breaks because of their workloads and a lack of relieving staff. In addition, we are aware that HNEI has historically failed to appropriately cover sick leave. Considering the increased workload associated with the move to the NMH, members feel that both situations are likely to worsen.

Changes to rosters and shift work arrangements

Members are not supportive of the need to alter current hours of work. We understand that some staff were presented with limited information in relation to this, issues were immediately raised, no further consultation has been engaged in, and no action has been taken in response to the issues.

Further, members are concerned that the changes to shift times may cause safety issues, for example, the shift time change means only 1 staff member is on duty between 11pm and midnight, leaving the lone employee isolated and vulnerable.

Proposals

To ensure the health and well-being of staff and the proper operation of services in the NMH, we call for, at a minimum and as a first step toward resolving these issues, HNEI to allocate an additional 1 FTE at the NMH to the properly address: the current understaffing, the significant increase in workload planned, and the inability of HNEI to cover meal breaks and leave in all departments.

Further, we call for appropriate amendments to HNEI's proposals to be made in light of the issues raised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J Lappin', written in a cursive style.

Jeremy Lappin
Industrial Officer
Health Services Union
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