

21 January 2021

Mr Gerard Hayes  
General Secretary  
Health Services Union NSW/ACT/QLD  
Locked Bag 3  
AUSTRALIA SQUARE NSW 1215

Email: [secretary@hsu.asn.au](mailto:secretary@hsu.asn.au)

Dear Mr Hayes,

**Port Macquarie Base Hospital Health and Security Assistants**

Thank you for your time last Friday and for your 19 January 2021 correspondence raising safety concerns at Port Macquarie Base Hospital (the hospital).

I acknowledge your ongoing support for the wellbeing of our Health and Security Assistants (HSAs) and appreciate your advocacy on their behalf.

Regarding your correspondence and four dot points, I provide the following response:

- This incident is being managed according to the NSW Incident Management Policy (PD2020\_047). An independent investigation will be undertaken into the events that occurred on the morning of 9 January 2021, comprised of team members from backgrounds relevant to the review. For clarification of this process, please contact Director Clinical Governance and Information Services, Ms Kathleen Ryan on 6656 5902 or via email at [Kathleen.Ryan1@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Kathleen.Ryan1@health.nsw.gov.au).
- The Mid North Coast Local Health District (District) has made a commitment to be transparent with the investigation outcomes and intends to provide a summary of the investigation findings and actions to staff.
- Changes have already commenced within the emergency department environment which includes collaboration between the entire team involved in a restraint. To ensure the safety of all staff, patients and visitors, the District strongly emphasises a teamwork approach which includes consultation between HSAs, medical and nursing staff.

The District reported the matter to SafeWork Australia and a Principal Inspector attended the site on 19 January 2021. The District have cooperated fully with their inquiries, and those of NSW Police, and await formal responses.

The District embraces and appreciates the support of NSW Police. Their partnership is paramount to our service and we welcome any opportunity to strengthen that relationship.

The District strongly supports the role of debriefing following incidents. Debriefs provide an opportunity to examine and consider how and why incidents occur. The District also provides counselling and guidance through our own expert services and often employs the assistance of the Employee Assistance Program for external advice. These services are available to all staff after an incident.

Mid North Coast Local Health District  
ABN 57 946 356 658

Morton Street PORT MACQUARIE NSW 2444  
PO Box 126 PORT MACQUARIE NSW 2444  
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- HSAs raised concern about cleaning duties restricting them from responding to duress calls.

In 2017/18, the District employed 20 FTE HSAs. This increased to 26 FTE in 2019/20, an increase of 38% over two years.

The District proposes to recruit an additional 1.5 FTE as a dedicated cleaning shift, seven days a week, to conduct terminal cleans, freeing the HSAs to respond to duress calls.

This will commence as soon as practicable and be reviewed regularly, in consultation with hospital assistants and HSAs, to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the position.

As you are aware, I remain in contact with the five HSAs involved in the incident and am holding a series of very constructive team sessions, connecting with HSAs and providing an opportunity for any questions or concerns to be raised directly with me.

These meetings comprise small groups in response to COVID-19 and have been held at all hours of the day to align with rostering. I sincerely appreciate that representatives of the HSU were able to attend these meetings along with myself and several Executive members of the District.

Some themes discussed include training and onboarding, skill practice and team communication with an aim to report back to the HSAs with outcomes from these sessions. I note some of these items have already been actioned and the District will work towards increasing training and professional development opportunities in consultation with the HSAs.

I can also advise the University of Newcastle, in partnership with four other universities across Australia, are conducting a research program of incidences of violence against rural and regional healthcare staff. The purpose being to develop evidence-based interventions to reduce incidences of violence. PMBH is one of five sites participating in this very important research program.

I have reached out to the Joint Chair of the Faculty of Health and Medicine, School of Nursing and Midwifery, and am advised there is an opportunity to extend the program to include security staff, beginning with researchers conducting a meeting to explore their perceptions of violence, impact and solutions.

The District will continue to strengthen our culture aligned to the NSW CORE values and where staff have opportunities for continuous learning and development, collaboration, inspiring leadership, and clear opportunities to contribute and work to their potential.

Thank you again for writing. If you require further information, please contact me on 6589 2300 or via email at [MNCLHDCE-EA@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:MNCLHDCE-EA@health.nsw.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



Stewart Dowrick  
Chief Executive

cc Mr Michael Kearns at [Michael.Kearns@hsu.asn.au](mailto:Michael.Kearns@hsu.asn.au)

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