

**Submission  
No 111**

**INQUIRY INTO REGISTERED NURSES IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES NURSING HOMES**

**Organisation:** Australian Nurse Teachers' Society

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The Hon Jillian Skinner  
Minister for Health & Medical Research  
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20<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Dear Minister,

**Re: Registered Nurse requirement for nursing homes under the NSW Public Health Act, 2010**

The Australian Nurse Teachers' Society is writing to express concern over the possibility that 24-hour coverage of Registered Nurses (RNs) in nursing homes may be removed if changes to the Aged Care Act 2014 are adopted. The Australian Nurse Teachers' Society is a national nursing organisation that represents nurse educators. We have members in all states and territories working in diverse areas of health, including aged care. Our mission is to support nurse educators, who assist and guide staff in maintaining quality in health care.

We believe that the removal of the distinction between high and low care nursing homes and the lack of RN presence places residents at high risk of adverse outcomes and lower quality of life. This will, in turn, place an added burden to the cost of health care. The elderly and frail elderly are vulnerable populations that need to be protected, and health care providers should be advocating for their safety and quality of life.

It is well recognised that in acute care an RN-rich workforce is associated with better health outcomes and less adverse events, for example decreasing mortality, infections, falls, and length of stay, than low-RN skill mixes.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> In aged care, direct care by RNs is associated with fewer residents experiencing

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<sup>1</sup> Glance LG, Dick AW, Osler TM, Mukamel DB, Li Y, Stone PW. The association between nurse staffing and hospital outcomes in injured patients. *BMC Health Services Research* 2012, 12:247. Retrieved from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/12/247>

<sup>2</sup> Kane RL, Shamlivan TA, Mueller C, Duval S, Wilt TJ. The association of registered nurse staffing levels and patient outcomes: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Med Care*. Dec 2007;45(12):1195-1204.

<sup>3</sup> NSW Nurses & Midwives Association, The benefit of more nurses. 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.nswnma.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Benefit-of-more-nurses-booklet.pdf>

hospitalisations, weight loss and catheterisations,<sup>5</sup> and urinary tract infections.<sup>6,7</sup> compared to non-licensed nurses. This has the potential to save substantial costs to the health care system.

Lack of RN coverage will mean that the RNs unique skills in assessment, problem-solving and decision-making based on their greater knowledge base will not be available. Therefore, any changes in the resident's condition, or situations where incidents occur (such as falls), will not be dealt with in a timely manner, and this can lead to complications and increased morbidity. RNs can also anticipate when incidents might arise, and implement strategies to prevent their occurrence.

The projected rise in the proportion of people over the age of 65 years in the population and the subsequent burden of increasing dementia, chronic diseases and higher acuity and complexity of health issues increases the need for quality care and monitoring. RN-level care and expertise will be in greater demand in the next twenty years.

The difficulty in recruiting RNs into aged care is not a valid reason to decrease RNs in the workforce. A multi-faceted approach is needed to encourage RNs into the aged care sector, including adequate financial remuneration, support for on-going professional development, and a re-focus on resident care rather than administration for the RN role.

In Summary, The Australian Nurse Teachers' Society supports the employment of RNs in nursing homes across the full 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Employing RNs will be a cost-effective way to improve residents' safety and quality of life, and to reduce the burden on the acute health care system.

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cc. Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSW Nurses and Midwives Association

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<sup>4</sup> Twigg DE, Duffield CM, Thompson P, Rapley P. The impact of nurses on patient morbidity and mortality - the need for a policy change in response to the nursing shortage. *Australian Health Review*, 2010, 34(3): 312 -316. Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7242&context=ecuworks>

<sup>5</sup> Horn SD, Buerhaus P, Bergstrom N, Smout RJ. RN staffing time and outcomes of long-stay nursing home residents. *The American Journal of Nursing* 2005, 105(11):58-71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Konezka RT, Stearns SC, Park, J. The staffing-outcomes relationship in nursing homes. *Health Services Research* 2008, 43(3):1025-1042.