



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

General Secretary: Brett Holmes | Assistant General Secretary: Judith Kiejda
P (02) 8595 1234 f www.facebook.com/nswnma t twitter.com/nswnma

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Mental health review must address skill mix concerns

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has welcomed reports the NSW Government has commissioned an independent review into seclusion, restraint and observations in the state's mental health system.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said it was vital the review panel took a close look at staffing skill mixes and overall staffing levels when considering issues of aggression and violence that lead to restraint and seclusion in emergency departments and mental health units.

"The skill mix of staff is a critical component in seclusion, restraint and observation practices throughout public mental health facilities and hospitals across NSW," Mr Holmes said.

"We will certainly be requesting the review panel to pay close attention to skill mix, as well as staffing ratios, and whether appropriate training and supervision has been provided across all settings.

"At the end of the day, the safety of staff and patients has to be given priority because of the potential risks and known levels of violence occurring in both mental health units and emergency departments.

"The use of 'specialling' or 1:1 nursing is one element to help reduce escalation issues for patients in mental health units however, we are concerned that staff assigned as 'specials' during a shift are often lower skilled and therefore inadequately prepared for the role of deescalating aggressive or self-harming patients and are vulnerable themselves.

"The broad terms of reference means the review panel will be extremely busy for the next seven months and I welcome the opportunity for our members to contribute to this review," said Mr Holmes.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 550 324

Gia Hayne, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317