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MO: H/07/07579

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
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Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 11 October 2007, enclosing Petition No. 911-07, regarding the provision of appropriate care from doctors and nurses in the public hospital system.

As you would be aware, the nature of nursing has undergone dramatic changes since the 1960s. Factors such as increasingly complex clinical health care, reduced length of stay in hospital, technological advancements in health procedures, and growth and expansion of the nursing role, require nurses to be prepared at a higher level, across a broad range of topics.

In Australia, training for registered nurses has been undertaken in the universities since the early 1980s. In 2002 the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs conducted an in-depth review of nursing education across Australia. This review was established to examine the future nursing educational needs of the health, community and aged care systems and to advise on appropriate education models and policy. Extensive consultation was undertaken across nursing, education and healthcare groups, and both Australian and international models were examined. The report from this review recommended that the educational preparation for registered nurses should remain in the tertiary sector. As nursing qualifications are transportable across all Australian States and countries such as New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, it is essential that consistency in the educational preparation remains the same within all these jurisdictions.

While recommending a continuation of university training, the Report did note that nursing is a 'practice' discipline and that the education of nurses must be closely linked to clinical practice. The report also recommends investigation of the benefits that may accrue to students from their employment in the health workforce. While this employment would not be part of the requirements of their educational program, potential benefits include a source of income and additional clinical experience. All Australian States are investigating ways to incorporate paid work for nursing students into their workforce frameworks.

To ensure clinical placements are meeting student learning needs as well as providing appropriate clinical exposure prior to graduation, Queensland Health is working with the universities to review models and better integrate clinical placements and classroom learning. The provision of clinical education and training is a vital component of developing a skilled and competent taskforce. To this end, in 2006 I established a taskforce to examine issues relating to clinical education and training across all professional health disciplines. Issues considered by the taskforce include those relating to professional pre-entry training, vocational specialty training and clinical training networks. The taskforce have made a number of recommendations to improve the delivery of clinical education and training and those recommendations will be implemented over the coming years.

The role of the Director of Nursing (previously referred to as “Matron”) is to provide strategic direction to the delivery and coordination of services by the facility or area. These nurses have a high level of expertise and knowledge in leadership, professional issues and resource management.

Queensland Health facilities such as hospital wards, clinics and services have nurses in the positions of Clinical Nurse Consultant or Nurse Unit Managers. These roles are responsible for coordinating delivery of care for that ward or service and include clinical standards and policies, management of staff and material resources and participating in education and research. These nurses are considered experts in their clinical area.

General practitioners currently are appointed by some health service districts to admit and perform procedures on patients in these facilities. These general practitioners must be assessed and comply with the “Queensland Health Credentialing and Privileging Guidelines 2002” on appointment and subsequently every three years. To our knowledge no other legislative amendments are currently required.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Lesley Fleming, Acting Chief Nursing Officer, Office of the Chief Nurse, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 3237 1550.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP