



College of Emergency Nurses, New Zealand - New Zealand Nurses Organisation

24 May 2021

Hon Andrew Little,
Minister of Health,
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

By email: a.little@ministers.govt.nz

cc. Mairi Lucas, Acting CEO, NZNO, by email: Mairi.Lucas@nzno.org.nz

cc. Kate Weston, by email: Kate.Weston@nzno.org.nz

cc. Office of Chief Nurse, Ministry of Health, by email: c/- debra.begg@health.govt.nz

Dear Minister

Re: Safety concerns in New Zealand Emergency Departments

We are writing to emphasize our escalating safety concerns regarding inadequate staffing and overcrowding in our Emergency Departments. We are concerned that we have only received an acknowledgement but no response to our previous letter on 25 March 2021.

Since we wrote, the numbers of people presenting to Emergency Departments continue to increase nationally, and to have significant negative impacts daily on outcomes for patients, the delivery of safe nursing care, and staff wellbeing. There are growing numbers of nursing staff resignations due to this situation. Emergency Departments are in crisis and we are signaling our need for immediate intervention.

The current baseline staffing levels of emergency nurses are inadequate to safely manage the numbers, acuity and complexity of people presenting to Emergency Departments. All Emergency Departments have alarming deficit in nursing care hours. Nurse patient ratios frequently reach as high as 1:7. Nurses are overwhelmed by the lack of staffing resources to provide safe care and worried about the significant risk of a sentinel event occurring in the current environment. Emergency nurses cannot take responsibility for adverse outcomes for patients in their care in these unsafe staffing situations.

Emergency Department length of stay continues to increase along with the numbers of patients leaving without assessment. The escalation pathways used in variance response management are seldom effective in urgently re-establishing safe practice situations.

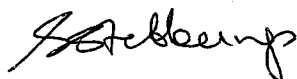
We request that you provide data showing:

1. The number of shifts worked in escalation
2. Rates of patients seen outside triage targets
3. Patient nursed in inappropriate spaces not intended for patient care
4. Percentages of patients that leave without assessment
5. ED performance against the recommended quality measures outlined in the ED quality framework and suite of quality measures 2014.

We also request a meeting with you to discuss the situation and provide you with impact statements from emergency nurses to demonstrate their distress and concerns working in Emergency Departments across the country.

We look forward to your intervention in these issues to ensure that emergency nurses work in an appropriately staffed department to provide safe and professional care to our communities.

Yours faithfully



Sue Stebbeings – Chairperson National Committee of College of Emergency Nurses New Zealand - NZNO
Emergency Nurse Practitioner, MN, RGON