



Waitakere nurses strike against understaffing

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6.40 -

CHRIS CHANG Nurses at Waitakere Hospital stroke and elderly care ward are going on strike this morning saying chronic understaffing is putting patients at risk. It comes after a patient fell and fractured his spine last Monday with nurses saying they'd warned management of severe capacity issues earlier in the day. Health NZ [New Zealand] said in a statement it's aware of concerns about staffing levels but the wards afternoon shift was fully staffed at the time of the incident. Joining us now is New Zealand Nurses Organisation delegate Gemma Bethell who was working on the ward that day. First of all, can you tell us about the incident and how is the patient doing now?

GEMMA BETHELL There's not a lot I can say about patient due to privacy issues but I was working on the morning and the incident end of the morning shift and the beginning of the afternoon shift. The morning shift was short staffed, we were three healthcare assistants down and so the patient should have been receiving 15 minutes. But understaffing, we were unable to fulfil those 15 minute checks. So basically the way it works is we had a system where we were notifying the management that we were three staffed down, we were on red at our capacity, at a glance or all of that shift. They did send down some support staff so QRT to come and help us earlier in the shift but they weren't available in the afternoon because of things going on in the wider hospital. And when the gentleman fell it was during the handover. So the afternoon staff had just started and we were finishing and he was found on the floor by the oncoming afternoon staff.

CHRIS CHANG So Health NZ says the ward was fully staffed at the time of the incident, is that not correct?

GEMMA BETHELL The afternoon, the oncoming afternoon staff were fully staffed but the outgoing shift were not and it happened right at the handover. So everyone was busy completing their documentation and actually handing over for the PM shift to start their shift.

CHRIS CHANG So is this a situation that you would normally have or was this just really bad timing?

GEMMA BETHELL It was unfortunate timing and I think like handovers are always critical times because you have less people actually with the patients because we're all handing over to each other. So while we were on the floor we were busy doing the formal handover so that they can start their shift.

CHRIS CHANG Okay, this isn't the first time the issue has been raised, has it? What's been done to address it recently?

GEMMA BETHELL So after the first Herald article came out, management did meet with us to discuss our concerns and they are putting plans in place to sort of try to address what were our issues are. But we haven't really seen any physical change on the floor. So they are, you know, talking about the resources we have available, so maybe making use of our QRT. And they did hire two new healthcare assistants to work on the ward, but they're not really open to discussing increasing nurse patient ratios and providing more staff like we're asking for so that we are able to complete our job to a higher standard.

CHRIS CHANG So what is the hope that you'll achieve from the strike this morning then, Gemma?

GEMMA BETHELL So what we're striking for is safe staffing. We're wanting better nurse to patient ratios. We are wanting to feel safe in our work environment and have patients receive care of the high standard that we're all hoping to deliver.

CHRIS CHANG Are you confident that strike time this morning won't affect the quality of the patient care during that time?

GEMMA BETHELL They have an LPS plan, so that stands for Life Preserving Services. So there is a plan for some of the staff to stay behind and also staff from other wards and QRT will be there. So for the hour that the staff do step out strike, the patients will be well cared for.

[Abridged]

Source: Breakfast

