

## **SKILL LEVEL NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED: NURSES**

**By Rachel Loveday**

Two Riverina nurses are concerned about planned new working conditions, which they believe could end up having a dramatic impact on the future of patient care.

The new government initiatives would see one nurse obligated to provide safe care to four patients, no matter how small or large each patients needs are.

Registered nurses Kathleen Gaudron and Debbie Dobbin, who work at Calvary Hospital in Wagga Wagga, believe that each patient's needs, as well as the skill level and responsibility of nurses should determine the number of nurses who work each ward, rather than a strict ratio.

"Some patients have very high care requirements whilst some patients are self caring. One nurse could have four patients that are self caring whilst another nurse could have four fully dependent and monitored patients wherein even one patient could require full time care for her whole shift," Ms Gaudron said.

"The level of skill and responsibility of the nurse is not taken into account. The Registered Nurse has total responsibility for all patients."

The General Workload Calculation Tool calculates the number of nursing staff to patients in general and surgical wards, it is responsible for the current ratio of one nurse to every four patients.

Both Gaudron and Dobbin believe that calculation tools that took into account the responsibilities of a nurse as well as the needs of the patients into consideration had worked in previous years and were more effective.

"I have seen different tools used over the years and the one that calculates the scope of acuity of each patient, rather than using a ratio of one nurse to four or five patients has been a lot more successful," Ms Dobbin said.

Lisa Kremmer, the organising team manager with the NSW Nurses' Association has said that whilst the calculation tool took in a range of factors to calculate the number of nurses that were needed, it did have its limitations.

She also said that the Association believes that a nurse to patient ratio would be more effective in delivering safe patient care.

"The (calculation) tool was designed to take into account a range of factors to calculate how many nursing hours were required per shift for the individual ward," she said.

“However the tool only applied to general medical and surgical wards and was therefore limited in its application.”

“The Association believes that a nurse to patient ratio system will deliver better and safe patient care.”

The nurse to patient ratio is an important issue in the new government initiatives. The new initiative was due in July and the government was asked to provide an offer by October 6. No offer has yet been provided.