

Tell us what you think

Recent night shift pushes enrolled nurse to the limits

WHY DO we allow ourselves to work so hard? It's because we want to care for those unsuspecting patients who have no control over staffing issues.

I had one of those nightmare shifts last month. It began during handover when the afternoon staff told us the skill mix wasn't the best, but it should be safe enough to get through the next eight hours. If we had any concerns, we should call the duty manager who might be able to help by deploying a staff member from a not-so-busy area for a short time. (I wonder where that area is – I think I might ask for a transfer!)

When you work in these conditions, you must fill out the work screening tool and a reportable event form. Do I fill the form out before I give the antibiotic, which was due an hour ago? I should really answer that call bell which has been ringing for the last 10 minutes. I have a patient needing a blood sugar done. Oh no, the "bloody" machine is flat . . . not both of them . . . Really!

This is my third night shift in a row. Once again, we only have five staff and no health-care assistant, who usually helps cushion the workload.

I am fed up having to work like this. I cannot give quality time to a patient telling me of his anxiety about his operation in the morning, or sit with an elderly lady who whispers, "Please don't go."

I, too, am crying within myself, and wondering how the hell I am going to get through my workload.

I speak to the senior nurse in charge and tell her my concerns. She listens sympathetically, touches my arm gently and says: "I understand, but just do your best. I am finding it stressful too – we are all in the same boat. Not long to go now – only three more hours. Just cross your fingers our sickies stay stable and, remember, we are a 24-hour service. What we cannot complete, the next shift may have to."

Writing about my feelings like this is good therapy. On reflection, no one died during my shift, just my feet and my head before going to bed. But now I find myself wondering: "Did I write down 900mls on the fluid balance chart? And did I sign for that drug?" I must phone the ward. . .

Anita Te Kahu, EN, Wellington

Send your letter to:

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We reserve the right to edit letters for sense and length. Shorter letters (under 400 words) are preferred. Please include address, nursing qualifications and phone number.

Neglecting democratic rights

WERE WE all overseas recently, or asleep? I ask because only about 6000 of us voted in our recent presidential election. NZNO has around 46,000 members. I fail to understand how so many of us neglect our democratic rights by failing to take part in our own elections.

Despite numerous articles in *Kai Tiaki Nursing New Zealand* and on the NZNO website, so many of us failed to follow through. The old excuses of "I don't know the candidates" or "I don't have time to vote", don't wash with me. Considering how little democracy we have under our current government, especially in Christchurch, I despair at the lack of interest we members show.

And how many of us voted for our district health board multi-employer collective agreement? Only 30 per cent of us. We either use our right to vote or not. If we do not, we risk losing that right altogether. Have a look at what the Australian Government is trying to do to our colleagues across the pond. Do we want to lose our penal rates too?

Heather Symes, RN, Christchurch

Don't segregate young nurses

I RESPOND to Hamish Hutchinson's article in last month's issue titled "Is NZNO relevant to young people?" My first and lasting response to his viewpoint is "Of course" – because NZNO is, to me, firstly a professional organisation. As I read the article, I became increasingly bemused. And then concerned, as I thought of all the young nurses who might read this article and dismiss NZNO as only a union.

My plea to all nurses is to have a balanced view of NZNO as a professionally-focused organisation, with unionism one aspect of its work. In all the time I have worked as an NZNO leader with government groups, especially those leading policy changes, the

biggest challenge I have faced is having NZNO perceived as being "only a union". NZNO has a strong and active focus on supporting the professionalism of nursing and yet the more visible and vociferous aspect of unionism is often all the public and policy makers see.

The NZNO campaign *Nurses making a difference in healthcare* is attempting to create more awareness of the professional nurse. Unfortunately, it is not as attention-grabbing as a good strike or a march down the main road protesting wage cuts, but for many members of the public, a professional nurse is key to health recovery and wellness. If union passion could be harnessed for professionalism, imagine how much more visible nurses could be!

In my experience, young nurses are often change agents. If we segregate them into a separate NZNO group, rather than integrating them and creating an NZNO-wide culture of recognition, support and leadership mentoring for our young nurses, then we will all be the poorer.

Rosemary Minto, RN, NP,
NZNO vice-president elect, Tauranga

Disappointed with cover

AS AN NZNO delegate, I have been asked by some of my colleagues to contact you regarding the latest magazine cover illustrating the theme of critical care nursing. We work at Christchurch Women's Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. As a rule, we do not wear wrist watches, for fear of damage to patient skin and to maintain infection control.

We are disappointed in the "pink hair with regrowth". We accept people have a right to individuality, but believe this image does not promote the professionalism of nurses and feel a better example could have been used.

Looking at the positive side, at least you got their attention!

Trish Graham, RN, BN, neonatal service,
Christchurch Women's Hospital

Cover shows poor practice

I AM writing to express my disappointment with the photo on the front cover of the August issue.

As an infection prevention and control link representative in my work area, a gold hand hygiene auditor and a member of the Infection Prevention & Control College NZNO, I find it disturbing that an expert registered nurse,