



Speech by

Mike Horan

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PSYCHIATRIC NURSES

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.31 p.m.): Tonight I want to speak about the issue of serious discrimination against experienced psychiatric nurses. I asked a question on notice of the Minister for Health regarding the provision of a qualification allowance to those nurses who have obtained extra non-university qualifications. In his reply, he advised me of the allowance that had been granted to those nurses, for example, who had obtained their midwifery certificates, various diplomas or other non-university additional qualifications.

One glaring omission is the psychiatric nurses who went through a very special and unique training system. Under the old system, before the days of nurses training at universities, most nurses went through a hospital based training system. They did their three years of training in the hospitals and became registered as general nurses. The allowance that the minister referred to applies, for example, to nurses who then went on to get their midwifery certificates.

At that time there was a very special course run at both Baillie Henderson Hospital in Toowoomba and the Wolston Park Hospital in Brisbane, both of which are psychiatric hospitals. That was a three-year course for psychiatric nursing. Graduates from that course were general nurses with specialist psychiatric qualifications. It was quite a different and unique type of course.

Today, many of those nurses in our psychiatric hospitals hold positions with high levels of responsibility. They are very experienced and are a very important part of the system. They have missed out totally on this qualification allowance because of the unique system that they went through.

In fact, the Queensland Nurses Council actually recognises those nurses and indicates on the nurses' registration form that the psychiatric nurse, irrespective of their training background, is declared a registered nurse with psychiatric endorsement. In other words, they are a general nurse with specialised three-year training in the area of psychiatric nursing. We are going to see some very serious anomalies where people are working in the same ward and those who have a higher responsibility, that is, these psychiatric trained nurses, are being paid less money than someone who is less experienced but has a university based nursing degree and receives the allowances that go with that particular degree.

I ask that, when he is considering the decisions that are to be made on the issue of non-university qualifications and the qualifications allowance that flowed on from the award negotiations, the Minister for Health fixes up this anomaly. We want to see equal pay for equal work and the wonderful training and responsibility of these psychiatric nurses rewarded.