

Question on Notice

No. 146

Asked on 22 April 2004

MS LEE LONG asked the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (MR BARTON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to public hospital trained midwives who are incensed that they are to be paid less for doing the same work as university trained midwives who have less practical experience than themselves and in many cases, the non-university trained midwives find themselves having to train university graduates making them feel totally violated—

How can the Beattie Labor Government justify such discrimination in payments to workers doing the same job?

ANSWER:

In the past, nurses gained basic qualifications sufficient for registration through hospital based training. The last hospital based course in Queensland public hospitals was completed in 1995. In keeping with the professionalisation of nursing, the qualifications required for registration are now university degrees. However, nurses who were registered after completing hospital based training have not lost their registration and are paid the same as university trained nurses. This transitional arrangement will continue for many years.

For over a decade nurses awards have recognised the professionalisation of nursing. Pay rates have been set on the basis of the value of nursing as professional work. The professional rates of pay set by industrial tribunals in the early 1990s recognised that nurses are professionals who work across a range of clinical settings including midwifery.

In June last year the Australian Industrial Relations Commission made a new award for nurses in Queensland public hospitals. For the first time since the early 1990s the award for Queensland public hospital nurses requires payment for qualifications additional to the basic qualification necessary for registration. The Commission made the award after hearing extensive evidence and submissions from the Australian Nursing Federation and Queensland Health.

The Industrial Relations Commission decided that it was appropriate to remunerate continuing education credentials but that the additional remuneration should be limited to credentials which are university based, or approved by the employer as equivalent to university based. The award provides that different amounts are paid depending on whether the qualification is a “continuing education credential”, which is defined by the award as a graduate certificate, graduate diploma or second degree in a clinical field relevant to the employee’s current position or a “continuing education advanced credential”, which is defined as a Masters or PhD in a clinical field relevant to the employee’s current position.

It is clear that the Commission decided to remunerate post-graduate qualifications for university trained professionals. The Commission did not make a decision about the value of the work being done by different nurses, but about the value of the qualifications held by different nurses.

In applying the provision awarded by the Commission, Queensland Health invited the Australian Nursing Federation to make submissions about which non-university based qualifications the union thought should be remunerated as being equivalent to university based credentials. As at 27 April 2004, the union has not made any submissions about hospital based training such as midwifery qualifications. Queensland Health will seriously consider any such submission made by the nurses’ union.