

MEDIA RELEASE

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NURSING IN LAUNCESTON

Murchison MLC Ruth Forrest has stated that the debate surrounding the push for a southern based University of Tasmania Batchelor of Nursing Degree, must be removed from the issue of travelling distances for students. "The highly emotive aspect surrounding travel to University that has tended to drive this debate, shows a total lack of concern and understanding of the student travelling needs, including travel times, road conditions and all other arguments that have been used, for all students who reside on the North West and West Coasts of Tasmania" Ms Forrest stated.

"The real risk is that by establishing a new School of Nursing in Hobart, and the potential longer term downgrading of Batchelor of Nursing Degree places in Launceston, the problem of nurse shortages will be moved from the South to the North, North West and West Coasts where it will always be more difficult to attract nursing staff to these areas' Ms Forrest said.

The Examiner and the Mercury both reported on July 21st that Premier Lennon stated that Launceston was incapable of catering to the nurse education needs that Tasmania has. "The Tasmanian public must be informed of the cost of establishing a Batchelor of Nursing Degree in Hobart and how this would be of more benefit than spending the same amount in upgrading the University of Tasmania Campus to meet that need" Ms Forrest said.

"The North and North West of the State have fought and worked long and hard to establish an efficient, high quality Degree program for nurses and this should be expanded to meet this need and ensure that the critical mass is maintained to attract the necessary professional staff, including professors, to establish a 'Centre of Excellence'" Ms Forrest stated.

The further issue of duplication of infrastructure and services must also be considered, particularly in light of the recent recommendations by Professor Le Grew, University of Tasmania Vice Chancellor that the university needed an up to \$6 million investment in digital and virtual technology to offer simulation training to nurses (Mercury July 20). "The state cannot sustain continued duplication of infrastructure and cost intensive courses, such as virtual reality simulation training for nurses, which must be established at Launceston where the well established School of Nursing and Midwifery should be expanded to a 'Centre of Excellence'" Ms Forrest stated.

More consideration needs to be given to alternate ways of delivering the theoretical component of nurse education. "A review into opportunities to streamline the

delivery of aspects of the theoretical components of nursing education and training, including video-conferencing, to reduce travelling for all but Launceston based students, should be undertaken before any new facility is developed” Ms Forrest said.

An important issue that has not been considered or debated in this proposal is the potential threat to the long fought for professionalism of nursing. “When nurses trained in hospitals, they were just that ‘trained’. If we are to maintain the high quality of nursing ‘education’ this must be University based, not hospital based. The public need and deserve well ‘educated and qualified’ nurses, not just ‘well trained’ nurses to provide a high level of professional care – it is vitally important that the professionalism of nursing is not undermined in any way” Ms Forrest stated.

“The Minister needs to inform the public if there is a push from within her department to take nurse education from the University back into hospitals, to allow nurses to be ‘trained’, with the real risk of a loss of the professionalism of the nursing profession in Tasmania” Ms Forrest said.

“Where there is a professional occupation, it is much easier to clearly identify and develop a defined career pathway and the ability to attract an attractive and comparable pay structure, that will assist nursing to be seen by prospective students as a desired and professional occupation in Tasmania. This will lead to more students undertaking nursing as a profession, thus addressing the issue of nurse shortages, claimed by the Minister for Health and the Premier as the driving force behind the call for a Southern based School of Nursing” Ms Forrest said.

The costs for Southern based families to send their young students to Launceston to undertake nursing, are certainly no more, and often less, than the costs families from the North West and West Coasts experience and should not be an issue in determining the expansion of the University of Tasmania School of Nursing, any more than the travel times and conditions should be.

If students are reluctant to undertake some clinical placement in Hobart, rather staying in Launceston and increasing the loyalty to Launceston Hospital, surely it would be appropriate to ensure students undertook clinical placements in all hospitals to ensure a wide range of experience was gained. As a General Practitioner needs to be competent in all areas of General Practice, General Nurses should graduate competent in all areas of General Nursing.

“Nurses need to be exposed to and prepared for work across all nursing health settings during their degree to ensure that specific, highly skilled areas and experienced as well as exposure to the varying demands of working in a rural hospital, where literally any medical situation may present. This can only be achieved with nursing graduates competent in all areas, if they are exposed to all areas during their clinical rotation, prior to possible specialisation” Ms Forrest suggested.

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