MEDIA RELEASE

Doctor’s suspension highlights greater need for mental health nurses

The suspension of a doctor’s medical registration has highlighted the greater need for specialist mental health nurses from the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP).

NSW doctor Claude Reitberger’s medical registration has been suspended, leaving his patients scrambling to find alternative care. Many of his patients have chronic mental illnesses and are on complex medication regimes.

Mental health nurses working under the MHNIP work with GPs and psychiatrists to support people with severe and persistent mental illness.

“This program is about supporting people with complex conditions. Mental health nurses working under MHNIP provide specialist mental health nursing care; providing clinical interventions, and monitoring their clients’ mental state, medications and physical health. These nurses keep people connected and stop them falling through the gaps of the health system”, said Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, CEO of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN).

According the AIHW Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Comorbidity of mental disorders and physical conditions, 2007, people with a severe and enduring mental illness have a higher risk of comorbid physical health conditions, which is why it is vital that their physical health care be well monitored alongside their mental health care.

“We need to expand the role mental health nurses play in the health system and recognise the considerable impact they make”, Ms Ryan said.

A review of the services mental health nurses provide under the MHNIP, undertaken by the ACMHN, highlighted their distinct contribution to the delivery of primary mental health care, resulting in highly visible positive outcomes for people with mental illness.

The current Government funding cap on the MHNIP threatens access to this highly important and specialised mental health service that vulnerable people require. The potential result of this is a similar situation to that of 300 Hostel.

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