MEDIA RELEASE

Minister must act on Nauru conditions

Following this week’s revelation on Lateline that conditions in the immigration detention centre on Nauru are ‘like a concentration camp’, the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is calling on Immigration Minister Brendan O’Connor to make a visit the island a priority. He needs to get first-hand experience of this appalling situation.

In an interview on Tuesday’s Lateline, with Marianne Evers, a nurse who briefly worked at the detention centre on Nauru before resigning in disgust, described scenes of misery, self-harm, desperation, including possible sexual abuse and in absolutely deplorable conditions.

To the ACMHN, the peak body for mental health nurses and an advocate for appropriate mental health provisions for all those under Australia’s care this is unacceptable. ACMHN’s CEO, Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, believes that steps need to be immediately taken to improve the mental health of those detained there.

“Minister O’Connor needs to go to Nauru and experience first-hand the distress of those in immigration detention. He needs true exposure to understand the depth and complexities of the suicide and self-harm crisis that currently exists”, said Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan.

“This is a humanitarian issue, not a political one, we have a responsibility to ensure good mental health and health care and to prevent further suffering” said Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan.

Adj. Assoc. Prof. Ryan said we all need to work together to improve the situation in detention centres – both on- and offshore – and, for this to occur, transparency and accountability is crucial.

The UNHCR report the situation on Nauru is likely to have ‘significant and detrimental impact on the mental and psychical health of asylum seekers’. As such, we need to act now to prevent increasing mental health problems.

“There needs to be an open dialogue between the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and relevant health professionals”, Adj. Assoc. Professor Ryan said.

The ACMHN supports the motion moved by Green’s Senator Sarah Hansen-Young this week to provide for transparency and public accountability about the conditions inside immigration detention camps in Nauru and Manus Island, and would like to see this extended to onshore immigration detention centres.

Media contact: Kim Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, ACMHN, 0417 289 189