A ‘matter of time’ before a teacher or nurse is killed

It is only a matter of time before a nurse or teacher in a bush community is either killed or seriously injured, according to the Shadow Minister for Health, Dr Richard Lim.

Dr Lim said violence against professional staff in bush communities was getting out of hand and the Government needed to act urgently to protect teachers and nurses.

It was reported today in the *NT News* that an angry mob at Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt forced a policeman to release a prisoner who had been arrested for offences relating to incidents at the community health clinic.

The trouble started on Friday afternoon when a woman took sanctuary in the health clinic after being beaten by her husband. The clinic was surrounded by the husband’s family and three nurses had to be rescued by police who travelled from Alyangula, 77 kilometres away. This incident followed one at the community school recently where a man with a machete threatened teachers. The school has since been closed.

Dr Lim said the Labor Government was “sitting on its hands” while the level of violence escalated.

“Only a month or so ago, I complained about nurses being attacked in the Alice Springs Hospital car park and being spat at, sworn at and punched by abusive patients in the Emergency Department. The Minister for Health made a joke of my complaints. These are incidents that should be subject to zero tolerance. The penalties for such offences must be severe.

“While I am aware that a whole community cannot be blamed for an individual incident, the Government must, at the highest levels, explain to community leaders that unless professional staff can be guaranteed safety at their community then schools and health clinics will, unfortunately, be closed indefinitely.

“Perhaps the Government could investigate the stationing of some sort of ‘permanent on-site’ security provided by the community for these schools and clinics.”

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