5th February 2007

1100 WAYS TO REDUCE THE QUALITY OF HOSPITAL CARE

The Territory Opposition has been informed that the Royal Darwin Hospital nurses’ roster will be short by a staggering 1100 nursing shifts for the month of February.

“A daily shortage of 37 to 38 nurses to fill shifts is placing enormous pressure on the rest of the nursing staff at the RDH,” says Dr Richard Lim, Shadow Minister for Health.

“Such gaping holes in the nursing roster are undermining the RDH’s capacity to deliver an acceptable standard of health care.

“It means existing nurses are being asked to work excessive overtime, to the point where the nurse’s own health is placed at risk and patient care is compromised.

“These types of work pressures are central to the recruitment and retention difficulties that plague Territory Health’s faltering search for nursing staff.

“The Health Minister, Chris Burns, needs to get himself involved in implementing both an urgent response and developing a long term solution to this problem.

“I’m aware that in an effort to cope with the ongoing staffing short fall, RDH is bringing in the equivalent of a bus load of agency nurses from interstate to fill the gaps.

“That is a ridiculously expensive way of alleviating staff shortages.

“I suggest the temporary recruitment of some of the many former nurses that reside in the Territory as an alternative to the use of interstate agency nurses.

It must be possible to put attractive offers before such nurses and still be cheaper than flying in nurses from interstate for short-term relief.

“Resolving the problem in the long term will require a new approach from the Government.

“Good wages and safe working conditions are prerequisites to being able to recruit enough nurses. The Government’s latest Workplace Agreement falls well short on both fronts.

“Until the Government recognises its shortcomings the vicious cycle of too few nurses working far too many hours at the expense of patient care will continue.”

FURTHER COMMENT : DR RICHARD LIM 0418 897 688