

29 January 2019

The Parliamentary Officer
Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation
House of Assembly
Parliament House
North Terrace
Adelaide, 5000

To whom it may concern

The Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation is conducting an inquiry into Workplace Fatigue and Bullying in South Australian Hospitals and Health Services. Thank you for the invitation for Health Consumers Alliance SA (HCA) to make a contribution to the inquiry.

HCA's submission will focus on terms of reference C: The impact of workplace fatigue and bullying on quality, safety and effective health services.

HCA is the peak body for health consumers in South Australia. We work with consumers and health services to position consumers at the centre of care. This work includes training and support to enable consumers and health professionals to collaborate in the design, delivery and evaluation of health policy, services and research.

There is growing international evidence of the link between workplace fatigue, bullying, general rudeness and reduced efficacy of clinicians:

- The American Academy of Paediatrics found that rudeness had adverse consequences on the diagnostic and procedural performance of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit team members, with rudeness alone explaining nearly 12% of the variance in diagnostic and procedural performance.¹

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics 2019

The Impact of Rudeness on Medical Team Performance: A Randomized Trial
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/3/487>

- The Kings Fund in the UK found through the Francis Inquiry that clinical teams perform best when their leaders value and support staff, enable them to work as a team, ensure that the main focus is on patient care, and create time to care.²
- A large US study across multiple hospitals found patients' observations of negative behaviours among surgeons could predict poor patient outcomes. ... This makes it more difficult to work with others and increases the risk of errors and poor outcomes for the patient.³
- University of Sydney research has found that 74% of Australian medical students experienced mistreatment during clinical placements and even more witnessed it. They also found that mistreatment can create cynicism and reduce empathy, which may directly affect patient care.⁴

Consumers have a right to access safe, high quality care and this is only possible in an environment where junior nursing and medical staff and students feel supported to ask questions and request assistance when they feel they need it.

In a negative, bullying health service environment where staff are bullied or harassed and become cynical and lacking in empathy, the following impacts can be experienced by patients

- not feeling heard
- not feeling respected
- not being believed (staff making negative assumptions)
- feeling communication is poor or denied information
- being denied pain relief or other essential medication
- being denied relevant diagnostic testing or submitted to unnecessary testing
- being denied access to appropriate treatment or submitted to unnecessary treatment
- experiencing discharge planning and processes as insufficient or unhelpful
- Experiencing unnecessary discomfort, pain, disability or death.

² The Kings Fund 2013

Patient-centred leadership: Rediscovering our purpose

https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/patient-centred-leadership-rediscovering-our-purpose-may13.pdf

³ Medical Journal of Australia, November 2018

Bullying and harassment of health workers endangers patient safety

<https://www.doctorportal.com.au/bullying-and-harassment-of-health-workers-endangers-patient-safety/>

⁴ Australian Medical Student Journal April 2018

Mistreatment in Australian medical education: a student-led scoping of experiences

<http://www.amsj.org/archives/6339>

This comes at a cost of the physical, emotional, mental and financial wellbeing of patients and their families, and for the health system, this can mean longer hospital admissions and an increased rate of readmission, putting further strain on health budgets.

The bullying culture also leads to higher rates of absenteeism and presenteeism, which contributes to overwork and fatigue for the remaining staff, and further increases the likelihood of patients receiving poor care. Staff who are feeling rushed or fatigued can have a reduced ability to concentrate, to listen or pay attention to detail, and they are less likely to be kind and respectful in the way they work with patients.

HCA believes that improving staff culture will lead to improved partnerships between clinicians and patients and would have the single biggest impact on improving consumer experience of the South Australian health system and improving their health outcomes.

Studies have shown that health services working effectively using a person-centred care approach can lead to improved workforce attitudes and job satisfaction, decreased emotional stress, decreased workforce turnover and absenteeism and improve overall workforce wellbeing.⁵ Therefore, working in partnership with consumers can actually improve staff satisfaction and workplace culture. HCA would recommend that strategies implemented as a result of this review are designed, developed and implemented in partnership between health service leaders, staff, consumers and student groups.

Yours sincerely



Julia Overton
Chief Executive

⁵ Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care 2018
Review of high performing person-centred healthcare organisations
<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FINAL-REPORT-Attributes-of-person-centred-healthcare-organisations-2018.pdf>