

30 November 2017

Joint Media Release: ANMF, AMA Tasmania, RHH MSA, HACSU

Royal Hobart Hospital

Mental Health Observation Unit

Health Unions and Organisations call on the Premier (as Minister administering the state service act), the Health Minister, and the CEO of the Tasmanian Health Service (THS) to;

- Immediately halt the opening of the Mental Health Observation Unit (MHOU) at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) and conduct meaningful consultation with clinical staff as required under the awards and agreements;
- Explain the decision making behind opening a unit that is regarded as unfit for purpose by our Unions and organisations;
- Utilise the scarce space, on site at the RHH by opening beds that will improve patient flow from the Emergency Department into hospital beds for unwell Tasmanians;
- Commit to opening 10 additional acute mental health beds to ensure the sickest mentally ill patients have access to appropriate inpatient care in Southern Tasmania.

Should the MHOU proceed health Unions, organisations and their members hold grave concerns about the ability of mental health patients to receive the quality care they deserve.

Background

On 2 October 2017, Unions and staff Associations received a change proposal in regard to the transit lounge at the RHH being redeveloped into a Mental Health Observation Unit (MHOU) to accommodate mental health patients in five beds and three chairs, who were deemed low clinical risk and had an expected length of stay of 48 hours or less. Within the same change proposal, the planned opening date had already been set for 30 October 2017.

On 9 October 2017, Unions and staff associations attended several face to face meetings with THS management and the Mental Health Services (MHS) management where members overwhelmingly raised significant concerns with the proposal. Key concerns were that the MHOU was not the most appropriate use of the space to aid in patient flow or provide quality care to mental health clients; the lack of appropriate model of care; concern with safely staffing the unit; concerns with work health and safety and the risk that the MHOU would either not have a good occupancy rate due to the lack of patients meeting the admissions guidelines, or would be used inappropriately at times of bed block placing members and patients at risk.

Substantial submissions in reply to the change proposal were made by all Unions on behalf of their members and correspondence upon receipt of these submissions indicated that the MHS were considering the feedback and 'would incorporate any changes to the unit' on the basis of feedback received.

However, on 23 November 2017, Unions were informed that following the consultation period there would be no opportunity to consider whether the MHOU was the most appropriate and meaningful use of the space at the RHH and the unit opening date was planned for Monday 4 December 2017. Some of the concerns raised by unions were discussed and THS and MHS management advised mitigating strategies had been put in place, however there were still ongoing concern, particularly in regard to staffing and quality patient care provision.

While all Unions note the absolute need to increase mental health services across the State, both in the community and within the acute sector, the consultation process around this change proposal is of particular concern.

At the first of the 'consultation' meetings, there were about 60 mental health staff who expressed frustration and opposition to this idea. They had also not been involved in any of the work that went into the proposal. Feedback is that the MHOU is a poorly thought out, poorly consulted idea that, according to the available evidence, either won't be used (because of the admission criteria) or will put patients at risk. By contrast, the alternative proposal has been well researched, consulted widely, and has the support of senior staff from ED and Medicine.

Union members and staff had asked for consideration for an alternate proposal which had support among all members at the RHH and this was:

- 1) Move the Emergency Medical Unit (EMU) to the current Transit Lounge (the proposed site for the MHOU). This would increase the EMU capacity by 7 recliner chairs. It should be noted that EMU patients include low risk, short stay mental health patients.
- 2) The move of the EMU to this new site on the below ground floor would free up the old EMU area to allow expansion of the Assessment Planning Unit (APU) by 10 beds. This would provide more desperately needed single and monitored beds for the older, more complex medical patients.

Unions and staff associations along with their members has hoped that through the consultation process that this alternate proposal could have been explored along with discussions about other strategies to assist with improving service, care and treatment

provision to mental health patients. It is most disappointing that this did not occur and does not comply with change consultation requirements within a number of union awards, which implies that THS and MHS management did not intend on carrying out meaningful consultation in the first instance.

All health Unions, specialist medical staff Association and their members furiously agree that that mental health services need additional capacity to replace the ten beds lost during the B Block demolition, however do not support the proposed mental health observation unit at the RHH as the appropriate solution.

Therefore, the group call upon the Tasmanian Government, Tasmanian Health System and Mental Health Services to:

- 1) Halt the opening of the proposed MHOU and consider members alternate proposal
- 2) Immediately identify appropriate additional space to accommodate the ten beds that were lost during the B block demolition that can accommodate acutely unwell mental health patients in an environment that promotes dignity and with therapeutic spaces.

~End

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