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RESIDENTS, NURSES AND CARERS – LOSERS IN SOUTHERN CROSS ‘BLAME GAME’

Elderly nursing home residents, nursing and care staff are the victims of the “blame game” between Southern Cross Care (SCC) and the Federal Government over a decision by SCC to slash over 2000 crucial nursing hours from its aged care facilities, according to the Australian Nursing Midwifery Federation (ANMF).

Despite recording a profit of over \$6 million in Queensland alone for the financial year ended 30 June 2016, the national provider has tried to blame the Federal Government for the devastating nursing cuts, claiming a \$1.2 billion reduction in funding to the aged care sector had “forced Southern Cross Care to review its operations”.

“SCC blames the Government and the Government blames SCC. Quite frankly, it doesn’t matter who’s to blame. Unlike SCC, we only care about the elderly nursing home residents who will be missing out on care and their nursing and care staff who will lose their jobs, or have their working hours dramatically reduced. They’re the victims of this blame game,” ANMF Federal Secretary, Lee Thomas, said today.

“Unfortunately, with no regulatory framework ensuring minimum staffing levels in nursing homes in place, the Federal Government is allowing providers like SCC to get away with cutting thousands of nursing and care hours for elderly residents, many of whom have highly complex needs.

“All providers have to do under current regulation, is provide what they deem to be an ‘appropriate’ level of care. That’s not good enough. Unless the Government introduces minimum staffing levels and ties funding to the provision of decent, safe care, nursing home residents and nurses and carers will continue to suffer.

“In the ACT, SCC was investigated over a dreadful incident where an elderly resident had 50 maggots in his lesions, another inquiry found it failed standards for clinical and behavioural management and skin care and in one Tasmanian facility, residents were left in bed and served cold food due to staffing shortages. We dread to think what’s going to happen if the Federal Government allows SCC to go ahead and slash thousands of nursing and care hours across its facilities.

“As a not for profit provider which claims to ‘look after’ people, SCC should be putting its elderly residents before any clumsy attempts to cut costs by sacking nursing and care staff in an effort to improve their financial position even further.”

In addition to nursing homes in Queensland, ANMF Members employed at Southern Cross in South Australia are also fighting against a reduction to staffing hours across five sites. The Branch has notified a dispute to the Fair Work Commission, whilst in Tasmania qualified carers under enterprise agreement hourly rates are being paid (\$20.83) which are under the Award.

“The Government is abrogating their responsibility if they do not step in and ensure that the funding they provide is enough to guarantee that vulnerable residents receive decent, safe care which must include minimum staffing requirements for nurses and carers. We can no longer trust the facilities to simply tick a box and say they provide ‘adequate’ care,” Ms Thomas added.

The ANMF, with over 259,000 members, is the industrial and professional voice for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing in Australia.

ANMF media inquiries: 0411 254 390.